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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE AWAKENED VOICE:

THE STORIES OF FOUR ABUSED WOMEN

by

KATHY GRIEVE

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

IN

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the stories of four abused women. It is a narrative study that focuses on the women's experience of abuse and explores the learning that helped them move from victimization to empowerment.

The first chapter presents a narrative account of why I chose to conduct research in this area. The chapter begins with my personal remembrance of a childhood experience and concludes with an account of my initial meeting with an abused women's support group. These stories set the tone for the thesis and help explain why I conducted the research.

The second chapter reviews the literature and reveals that educational remedies are instrumental in facilitating women's movement away from abusive situations. Chapter 3 shows that life experience approaches are legitimate and necessary in making sense of important social issues like abuse and it describes the actual research involved in this study.

Chapter 4 is the voices of the four women who were able to change their circumstances through self-discovery and group action. It reveals, through individual stories, the process of personal growth that each of the women experienced. This personal growth led them to a greater appreciation of themselves and other women. In the most fundamental way, the development of self-esteem and personal power led these four women to question society and the forces within in that constrict women from achieving equality and growth.

In Chapter 5, the link between the women's stories and theory is explored. An interpretation of the kind of knowing and learning that abused women

experience is undertaken within the context of the experiences of the four women who shared their stories. It documents the learning process from silence to voice.

The final chapter presents ideas about how the amplified voices of women can create change. The co-researchers identify some strategies that they feel may be incorporated into positive action for abused women.

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CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

> When I was a child my fear was a profound intuition about life. A woman is born fully prepared for the fear she will experience. I live as women do: I pretend I am not afraid. (R. Carrier, 1993)
>
> A better understanding of women's experience would permit, even force, a far-reaching revision of the broader fields of education and intellectual life. (P. Palmieri, 1979)
>
> The answers were in the stories. The answers were the stories. (D. J. Clandinin & F. M. Connelly, 1994)

Introduction

This thesis is about voice. It is a narrative that presents the stories of four abused women who have broken their silence and given voice to their experiences. And it is about me, the researcher, who listened to their stories. The stories shape the research and create a resonating voice – the awakened voice.

Two personal stories provide the narrative beginnings of this research. They address the issue of what motivated me to research spousal abuse. The "why" story stimulates the creation of the "we" story, describing the basis of my motivation to explore the world of abused women.

Chapter 1 creates a structure for the thesis and sets the stage for the narrative character of the research. It is meant to establish the tone for the study, and speaks to the personal nature of this research. I share the stories to provide a platform from which the voices of the research participants can be heard.

The "Why" Story

Who knows why people do what they do? I have focused my thesis on the experiences of some abused women and I am frequently asked what motivated me to approach such a subject. My cynical self hears a hint of titillation in these queries. I hear imaginary conversations. "Perhaps she was abused. Maybe her present husband is batting her about regularly. Possibly it was the first one. They say you never can tell. Why just last week I watched – what do you call it? – a docudrama on TV, and the battered woman seemed pretty normal, almost like one of us." My trusting self thinks that these questions represent genuine interest in, and concern for, abused women.

In any event, as I sit down to write this narrative, I sit down to meet myself. I sit down knowing that despite all the questions of others, well meaning or otherwise, I will have to confront myself with the "why." I know that through recalling some life events, and through remembrances of my family and friends, I will encounter myself and my motivations for trying to describe the experiences of battered women. I sit down knowing that I will have to face and share that paradoxical person whose life is at once whimsical and committed, spiritual and materialistic, concerned and carefree, centred and scattered, confident and insecure.

I sit down knowing that I will tell only part of the story, not because I want to consciously or deliberately "dupe" myself or my readers, but because there are some recollections that belong only to me. As I meet myself, I may find a recollection that I choose to suppress. As I sit down to write, I acknowledge my

own need for self-preservation, and for maintaining a sense of my private self. I know that if I choose to tuck a memory away, I can reach back and call it up whenever necessary. So I anticipate, and even plan exclusions. I do not apologize for them, but simply acknowledge them to myself.

As I sit down to write, I am reminded of some special events, awakenings if you will. These have propelled me into the often scary, but ultimately understandable, world of battered women. As I sit down to meet myself, so do you, the reader, meet me.

***

Davette Kent, that was her name. And there she was on Jasper Avenue. At least, there was a 22-year-old version of Davette Kent. This "Jasper Avenue" version of Davette hadn't changed much physically from the 12-year-old I met more than 30 years ago. I wondered what the real Davette looked like now. Changed, no doubt, like the rest of us. Changed, just as I was.

Change is what brought Davette and me together in the first place. It's my first recollection of change, at least my first conscious remembrance of what has come to mean any combination of fear, anxiety, success and growth. However, I didn't know all that in Winnipeg in 1958. All I knew then was that my father had taken a new job in a new town and put life, as I had known it, in jeopardy and in peril. To put it simply, it was a situation that made me want to throw up. I felt alone, scared, angry, and in need of what my mother called "something for my nerves."

That "something" turned out to be Davette Kent. She was what my 13-year-old son, Matthew, would call a "nerd, a "geek," she needed to "get a life." Her hair was a limp, mousey-brown mass of knotted string that screamed the word "scummy." Back home in Victoria I wouldn't have been caught dead within 50 miles of this creature. However, I was in need on that early-September day in Manitoba, and Davette Kent turned out to be a lifeline for me. She was a small ray of hope in an otherwise daunting and devastatingly desperate situation. All the kids around me were sharing their deepest summer secrets – those embellished remembrances, that are such an important part of the first return to school. While my stomach was loop-de-looping, Davette Kent, who had the poor judgement to dress in mismatched plaids (a grievous fashion "faux pas," according to my mother), smiled at me. I thought it was a belligerent sort of smile, especially for a girl. She looked me in the eye and queried, "What's your name? Are you new here?"

***

What has that to do with why I have chosen to research the experiences of some battered women? What was the impact that this relatively common, childhood experience had on my decision to explore the often terror-filled world of women who have been abused by their male partners? What could have happened in my life then that compels me now to try to understand this serious social problem?

The Davette Kent scenario is a metaphor for my realization, the revelation that women are not naturally my competitors. Davette dared to differ. She defied

the conventionality that I thought was crucial to my existence, and because of her singularity she built community with me. She allowed me the opportunity to connect with her and created my first inkling I am linked to other women. What happens to one of us could happen to any of us.

Davette, with her seeming disregard for the prevailing "etiquette" of the time, was important to my understanding of my femaleness. Her willingness to reach out to me, fostered notions of community and communion in me. When my "cushy," very privileged life seduces me into thoughts that I am not connected to other women and their experiences, I recall Davette and her quirky way of relating. I remember that I not only came to like her, but cherished her. Even though I failed to understand her some of the time, and was embarrassed by her most of the time, I always appreciated her. I felt loyal to her, regardless of our outward differences. I felt we supported each other.

Davette provides an image for me, an image of connection, an image that life just might be a manageable project. I have a perception of us supporting each other, of championing each other's causes. It is in this sense of a link between women that I seek to connect with women abused by their male partners.

The "We" Story

The room where we (13 women) meet each Monday night is hot and windowless. It has cushioned, mismatched furniture, arranged square-like, so when we sit we can all see each other's faces. When we first enter we talk about how hot the space is, or what kind of coffee we'd like–regular or decaf. It's safe talk,

in what we believe is a safe place. We've gathered to share ourselves with each other, and protection and security are critical issues.

We are a gathering of women with a need to talk and share. What brings us together is private "stuff." Stuff that's hard to talk about. Stuff that hurts us and makes us feel low and humiliated. We each have a story, also private and unique. As we slowly and tentatively speak about ourselves, some common themes begin to unfold. We start by voicing individual stories, then move to stories of women as a whole.

We are a group of battered women who are meeting to try to make some "sense" out of the "senseless." We meet to tell our stories, and they are not fairy tales. In these first weeks our voices are hushed and fearful. We speak of horrors that haunt us from the past, or terror that we live with day to day. We voice our dread and though our stories are distinct, they resonate with common themes. Themes about attitudes that should not be tolerated. Themes about experiences that carve and lacerate our essence. Themes of power, control and dominance.

I am learning a lot from these sessions – about myself and about some men's abuse of their female partners. I had a notion, rather vague at first, that I would connect to these stories. I can sense that I am approaching the time when I will write about the more direct association that I feel with these battered women. I am discovering all 13 of us can relate to what our co-facilitators label as the "roles" that society encourages in us. Roles that don't always work in our favour. Roles that keep us silenced and afraid. Roles that nurture our anger and resentment, and condone our remaining in relationships that make us feel like

prisoners. These roles, including caregiver and sexual object, foster in us the belief "we must make the best of a bad situation," that we are to blame for "causing" the abuse whether it is physical, mental, sexual and/or financial.

We ask each other, "Just what is this abuse anyway?" We struggle for a concrete definition, one that somehow might just make sense. Like everything else that happens in our adult world, abuse has no one definition. There is no singular way to describe the complexities of what we have come to call the "cycle of violence." So we must work it through together and admit to each other that it's an ambiguous definition. Its murky with men we hoped we could change – men we thought we could transform, shape, mould into the someone that we were sure was lovable and who, at some point, probably was. In fact, that lovable man inks through from time to time. All of us can attest that no one abuses 24-hours a day. We are seduced by the repentant man who freely admits he was wrong, and promises it won't happen again.

Conversation is central to our growth. It is the fabric that we carefully cut and pattern so we might come to reshape our battered selves. Dialogue helps us discover our voices. We speak tentatively, at first, but our voices become magnified as we hear the commonalities in many of our stories. Our collaborative exchanges serve as an opportunity to mend and heal so that we might go on to a different life. It isn't a fast or easy operation. So far there have been tears, an abundance of tears, and I have felt and shared the awkwardness and discomfort generated by the tears of others.

I don't know how long we will focus and refocus on the sadness and fear. Many of us seem swallowed up by these emotions and I can't help wonder, "Where is the anger?" I hear voices so steeped in sadness that the underlying anger is silenced. I wait for us to explore our anger, to tell our stories so that we can make sense of our individual experiences and create a collective voice that could help end the abuse. I listen carefully, attentively, and actively as the stories begin to unfold.

CHAPTER 2

THE BACKGROUND STORY

Linking the Literature on Abuse to Learning

Many women experience abuse in their intimate relationships and the literature suggests that spousal abuse is a serious social problem. Research statistics indicate that one in 10 Canadian women is married to, or lives in an intimate relationship with a man who physically beats her (Lupri, 1989). The Statistics Canada report, *The Violence Against Women Survey* (1993), reports that one in four women in their study experienced violence in a current or previous marriage. Alberta statistics reveal that wife battering has occurred in 13 to 14 percent of its families (Kennedy & Dutton, 1987).

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used to help understand women's experience of abuse. Much of the research has focused on the following considerations: 1) what causes the battering? 2) what are the psychological effects of being battered? and, 3) why do women remain in battering relationships? All three are interconnected and, taken together, they help provide a framework for understanding the complexities of battering.

MacLeod (1987) addresses all three questions in her study, *Battered Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Battering in Canada*. Her research underscores the seriousness of spousal abuse and suggests there is no single and absolute remedy, but rather "a constellation of inter-connected services to reduce the costs and prevalence of wife battering" (p. 6). Thus, her research implies that helpful

responses to wife battering are varied and include legal, medical, political and educational interventions.

Many of the studies (Johnson, 1990; Straus & Gelles, 1990) centre on physical battering. However, emotional abuse has been reported. Walker (1979, 1984) found that battered women report emotional, psychological and sexual abuse. She describes some behaviour exhibited by abusers that indicates psychological and emotional abuse. They include: 1) verbal name calling and continual name calling of the abused woman, 2) isolating the abused woman from social support, and 3) destruction of the abused woman's material possessions. She characterizes sexual abuse as excessive jealousy, forced sexual activity, rape and mutilation of genitals and breasts.

Much of the recent literature suggests that abuse of women has been misunderstood and mythologized (MacLeod, 1987; Walker, 1979, 1984)). Walker (1979) mentions some common myths concerning spousal abuse. Some of the more prevalent myths are:

1) spousal abuse only affects a small percentage of women,
2) abused women are masochistic,
3) abused women are mentally ill,
4) poor women experience abuse more often then women from other economic classes,
5) minority women experience abuse more than anglo women,
6) adherence to religious beliefs will prevent abuse,
7) abusers are not loving partners,
8) long standing abusive relationships can change for the better and,
9) abused women can always leave home.

Walker's research dispels these prevailing myths and reveals that battered women remain in abusive relationships because they feel powerless. Walker

believes that women experience a "cycle of violence" that involves three stages: "the tension building phase; the explosion of acute battering incidents; and the calm loving respite" (p. 532). She maintains that women experience "learned helplessness" and advises that women can "unlearn" this helplessness, or rather can learn to empower themselves by extricating themselves from the battering relationship.

Based on her research, Walker suggests that abused women need assistance to end their victimization. She believes that it is unlikely that battering relationships of long standing can change for the better and the abused women's best hope is to terminate the relationship. She maintains that abused women need assistance from legal and medical- service deliverers, as well as education practitioners. The implication is that education and learning have a place in the critical decision-making process of battered women. The challenge is to develop intervention programs that speak to these issues. Her call for intervention identifies the need for support programs that help women explore and understand all the factors that influence their critical decision making, in order to help them end their victimization.

A qualitative study by Kordyban (1987) examines battered women's experiences in group counselling that was based on a feminist-therapeutic model. She conducted a series of interviews with women who had participated in group-counselling sessions that were provided at an Edmonton shelter for battered women. She talked with four women and the interviews were taped. After thematically analysing her data, Kordyban concludes that:

> Physically and emotionally abused women need the opportunity to learn new ways of relating (i.e., sharing feelings and personal experiences; expressing needs). Learning what constitutes a healthy, supportive, non-abusive relationship helps women to expect the same type of relationship outside the group setting. Expanded awareness of the prevalence of wife assault helps to lessen battered women's self-blame. (p. 123)

Kordyban refers to the need for battered women to understand the socio-political factors that contribute to spousal-abuse. She found that the group-counselling experience "expanded their awareness of their victimization within their own marriage, as well as the victimization of women in society generally" (p. 125). She reports a need for battered women to comprehend the scope and depth of their particular situation and suggests that programs should be developed to facilitate this understanding.

In order to provide appropriate programs for battered women it is important to ask: Why do women remain in these violent relationships? The reasons are varied and complex, ranging from economic factors to socio-psychological influences (Johnson, 1992). For example, women report that they remain in destructive relationships because they feel financially tied to the relationship or because they feel they lack the competence to live on their own (Maertz, 1990). Walters, Carter, Papp and Silverstein (1988) present another perspective on what influences women's decision to stay in or leave an abusive relationship. They maintain that gender inequality and gender-socialization issues are central to this critical decision-making process.

McGregor (1990) agrees that the decision is influenced by gender and socialization factors. She maintains that societal values support women in a

decision to stay in an abusive relationship. Knowledge and understanding of the ways society serves to limit women's power is instrumental to a move towards gaining power to act. McGregor (1990) believes that intervention programs should empower women to leave abusive relationships and "empowerment through knowledge and understanding" (p. 69) is imperative to the decision to leave the violent relationship.

The literature implies that learning can be an important factor in the decision-making process. Critical theorists (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Mezirow, 1981, 1991), including feminist critical pedagogues (Hart, 1989; Mies, 1983), explore the relationship between learning and action, in the context of power differentials between people. Critical theorists seek "to reassess the relationship between theory and practice in the light of the criticisms of the positivist and interpretive approaches to social science which has emerged over the last century" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 131). Habermas, a philosopher whose work is fundamental to critical theorists, sought to "reveal how different kinds of knowledge are shaped by the particular human interest that they serve" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 134). He developed a "critical social science" that uses self-reflective understanding to explain the scope of frustrating situations. This self-reflective understanding, according to Habermas, leads to emancipatory action.

Mezirow, (1975) developed a learning theory that explores "peoples' actions as well as their stated ideas accompanying these actions" (p. viii). This theory, called perspective transformation, emphasizes that critical awareness of ourselves and all our relationships is crucial to learning that facilitates change. Mezirow

developed these concepts as a result of a study about women participating in college re-entry programs. He discovered that the women's decision to enter such programs was strongly influenced by the "traditional stereotypical view of the 'proper' roles of women and the strong feelings internalized in defense of these role expectations by the women themselves" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 123). He recognizes the need for the realization of how psycho-cultural influences affect decision making. This awareness is instrumental in a learning process that moves towards action and shows how,

> the internal dynamics of adult learning operate within the cultural context, how critical reflection, discourse, and action can change culturally assimilated assumptions and premises which limit and distort understanding and give learners greater control of their lives. (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 190)

In *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Mezirow (1991) contends that an awareness of the cultural context of learning is the key to learning that facilitates problem solving. He theorizes that there are inherent inequities in the socialization process. This suggests that Mezirow believes that the injustices in society influence learning and have an impact on problem solving. The gender imbalances in society therefore influence learning. Mezirow asserts that learning is central to problem solving, which in turn, is essential to moving towards action or "emancipatory action" (1981, p. 125). He implies that to solve problems or move toward action, it is necessary that one understand the inequalities inherent in society.

Furthermore, Mezirow (1981) argues that emancipatory action is a "central function for adult education" (p. 125). That is, he considers learning as crucial to

emancipatory action. The research concerning spousal abuse calls for an understanding of the societal factors that contribute to the dilemma. It follows that documenting the kind of learning involved in battered women's decision to withdraw from the battering relationship would be important to adult educators who wish to empower women.

Hart (1990a), a feminist critical pedagogue, also deals with the notion of personal transformation and includes the concept of collective social action. She maintains that educators must consider the specific role that gender plays in socialization. Recognition of the interplay of social structures with individual action sets up the basis for what Hart calls "consciousness raising" which is for her, a critical element in education that facilitates change. "Consciousness raising is therefore a process of transformative learning because it changes the structure and the frame of experience in general and thus the entire frame of reference within whose parameters the individual woman has been acting so far" (1990a, p. 55). The interrelationship between the personal and the political is a dynamic that can be used to foster personal and structural change.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) conducted research into "women's ways of knowing." That is, they investigated whether women's conceptions of knowledge and truth and their ways of learning varied from men's understanding of these notions. They found that "women's self concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined" (p. 3). Through listening to women's life stories and descriptions of pivotal events in their lives, they discovered that women used the metaphor of voice to explain their understanding of themselves and the world

around them. Voice represented the recognition that women's experiences are valid and important. Voice provides women with the opportunity to formulate, develop and the change the system to meet their needs. As the women in the study found resolute voices, they were able "to gain control over their lives" (p. 4) Voice helped the women move towards empowerment and the authors of the study stress that listening to women's voices is important for educators who wish to empower women.

The authors of the study believe that ideas about truth and knowledge have been deeply influenced by our male dominated culture. Our societal institutions, and education in particular, has been established by men for men. The authors assert that there has been a lack of focus on how women know and learn within that system. Their research supports that of other theorists (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Harding 1987; Lather, 1991) who have made a case for concluding there is a male bias in much of the academic process. All of these theorists assert there is a need to include the female voice in critical pedagogy.

Belenky and her associates (1986) maintain that women have distinctive ways of knowing. They analyzed women's experiences of knowing into five categories: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. Voice, or lack-of voice, was central to all their classifications. The authors identify a need to examine ways of knowing that are unique for women so that learning strategies can be developed that meet women's specific needs.

The research conducted by Gilligan (1982) and Brown and Gilligan (1992) also uncovers the significance of voice to human development. Their investigations outline moral development related to ethics of responsibility and care. The research centres on voice:

> so that the social construction of reality – the construction of the human world that is institutionalized by society and carried across generations by culture – will be built by and acoustically resonant for both men and women. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 70)

Gilligan believes that women can learn to give voice to their unique realities. In other words, voice is one way that women can empower themselves. Through voice, women can learn that they are capable of intelligent thought and they have the ability to make desired changes in their lives. It follows that educators who concern themselves with facilitating positive change in women's lives need to listen to women's voices in order to create appropriate programs.

Questions Arising

The literature presents a wide and complex picture of spousal abuse. It illustrates the complexities of an abusive relationship and helps explain why women often feel trapped in them. Common to all the research is a call for solutions, including educational remedies (Johnson, 1992; Kordyban, 1987; Walker, 1979, 1984). The suggested interventions include establishing support programs that assist abused women in building a new life for themselves. Program content should reflect the research findings such as helping the participants to increase self-esteem and to develop awareness of what has contributed to their victimization.

Much of the research points to the need for further understanding of women's experiences of abuse and programs should be aimed at helping them break out of the battering relationship. Kordyban (1987) writes that group-support programs for battered women must "provide a supportive environment so that women can acquire a new knowledge about their victimization" (p. 125). Knowledge then is an important aspect to facilitating a move away from the battering relationship. Learning to see the total scope of the battering relationship helps move battered women toward a new perspective of their circumstance and supports a move toward positive action. It could provide the foundation for an emancipatory process that allows battered women to change their situation.

The experiences of abused women can inform us about the learning that is important in the decision to leave an abusive relationship. The purpose of this study is to give voice to the experiences of some women who have been in and left abusive relationships with their spouses. The study will present the women's stories in hopes of uncovering the factors that contribute to women being abused and the kind of learning and knowing that helps women leave abusive situations.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH STORY

Approaching the Research

> The life history approach has, in recent years, come to be seen as a successful medium for collecting women's words, that is, for reaching a social "group" that does not often speak on the social stage, or, more precisely, whose discourse has not, until recently, been perceived as legitimate. Women's words are viewed as embedded in a narrative – that is, in a specific scheme that makes sense. (Gluck & Pate, 1991, p. 77)

Why Use Narrative Inquiry?

Storytelling is a big part of many people's lives. Most of us have some recollection of our favourite childhood stories whether they emanate from "truisms" passed down through the family, or are parables that helped us make sense of the complex issues we face in life. Storytelling has been central to our history and is an important component of our understanding of ourselves and the world in which we find ourselves. Anderson and Jack (1991) contend that this is specially true for women.

> Oral histories are particularly valuable for uncovering women's perspectives. Anthropologists have observed how the expression of women's unique experience as women is often muted, particularly in any situation where women's interests and experiences are at variance with those of men. (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11)

The realities of battered women's stories of their experiences could inform us as to their distinctive way of knowing and understanding. The insights that can be gained from framing their narratives could facilitate a "search for the choices, the pain, the stories that lie beyond the 'constraints of the acceptable discussion'" (Gluck & Pate, 1991, p. 11). By using narrative inquiry, that is by telling the

individual and collective stories of some Edmonton abused women, I hoped to uncover the stories that lie beneath the surface. I believed that listening to and retelling the stories of these women would increase knowledge about abuse so that educational responses would be sensitive to and appropriate for abused women.

According to Romanyshyn (1978) the subject matter should determine the research method. I believed that it was imperative for the research approach to reveal the experience of abuse from a woman's point of view. The topic is dark and difficult so I searched for an approach that would pragmatically address experiences that lie beyond the realm of social acceptability. Since much of the recent research involving women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; and Gluck & Pate, 1991) focuses on women's voices, a collaborative narrative inquiry seemed to be a good choice.

Clandinin and Connelly (in press) support the use of narrative inquiry in educational research. They maintain that our human experiences are storied experiences and that narrative inquiry "is the study of how humans experience the world" (p. 2). By recording and interpreting lived experience, a researcher can bring to life the participants' understanding of knowledge and truth and vocalize their specific needs. Narrative provides a framework for articulation that is germane to change. Clandinin and Connelly refer to awakenings, the "process of becoming aware through living, telling and retelling stories" (p. 9). Awakenings or awareness facilitates transformation and change. I was interested in tuning in to

the awakenings of battered women who had left the abusive situation. I hoped to discover ways that education might help cultivate those awakenings.

The storied approach to this research places the study within the domain of personal experience methods. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) identify experience as central to theorizing and maintain that the "social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environments and, as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience" (p. 4). Their narrative approach seeks to highlight the importance of experience and assumes that experience is "both temporal and storied" (p. 5).

Knowledge and education are themes that are present in Clandinin and Connelly's work, *Narrative and Education* (in press). The two writers maintain that living and learning are connected. "Education is more interwoven with living and with the possibility of retelling and reliving our life stories" (in press). The storytelling helps to focus the living and learning, and it shapes understanding. For Clandinin and Connelly the living, telling and retelling of our lives is represented in an ongoing process they call "cultivation." They argue that cultivation is both intentional and unintentional. It is represented in our more "formal" or institutional forms of education and is also found in the daily business of living. The experience of living shapes our ways of knowing, and it is important to attend to the each individual's experiential process so that we can think about how cultivation influences the individual's way of knowing.

Clandinin and Connelly distinguish between living, telling and retelling the stories of our lived experience. As we live out our stories, we begin to awaken to

new possibilities. As we shift paradigms, the "horizons of our knowing shift and change to new ways of 'seeing' ourselves in relation to each other and to the world. We begin to retell our stories with new insights, in new ways" (Clandinin & Connelly, In press). The telling and retelling of the stories of battered woman then could have an impact on the horizons of our knowing and could direct us to new awakenings.

Awakenings, according to Clandinin and Connelly, are new ways of seeing our stories that lead to transformations or a "reliving of our stories with changed actions" (in press). Mies (1983) presents a case for using a research methodology that speaks to the concepts of awakenings and transformations that lead to change. She contends that research, at its apogee, should encourage and support emancipatory action and "should be accompanied by the study of women's individual and social history" (p. 127). Researchers (Johnson, 1990; Kordyban, 1987; MacLeod, 1987; Walker, 1979) have identified the need for battered women's understanding of the multitude of factors that impact the decision to withdraw from the abusive situation so that they can make changes in their lives. Narrative inquiry presents the opportunity to learn from experience and to use that learning towards emancipation.

I used narrative inquiry, the telling and retelling of battered women's stories and my own story of hearing the stories, as a research approach. Harding believes that we can learn from women's experiences. She says:

> Recognition of the importance of using women's experiences as resources for social analysis obviously has implications for the social structures of education, laboratories, journals, learned societies,

> funding agencies – indeed, for social life in general. And it needs to be stressed that it is *women* who should be expected to reveal *for the first time* what women's experiences are. (Harding, 1987, p. 7)

By working collaboratively with participants, I hoped to explore women's perspectives, real-lived experiences, on an issue that affects us all.

I viewed this research as feminist research. According to Reinharz (1992) feminist research is "used in research projects by people who identify themselves as feminist or as part of the women's movement" (p. 6). I classify myself as feminist and I am concerned with research for women. Reinharz believes that the criterion of self-identification has the added advantage of allowing us to "go directly to the work of people who take the label for themselves and to avoid deducing what feminist research is from the standpoint of [my] personal definition" (p. 7). I have used this gauge in my approach to the stories that the women told me and my story of their story. I looked to feminist theory that might help me to understand the themes that were evident in the all our stories, and thus made linkages with recent feminist literature and thinking.

Doing the Research

It was over a year ago that I decided I wanted my research to centre on the experiences of battered women. Having read a great deal of literature supporting the use of narrative inquiry, I was convinced that I wanted to use this research approach. The next question was just how was I actually going to do the research? Where would I start?

My intuitions about collaboration guided me. I looked to a friend who worked in women's educational programming for advice. After many lengthy

discussions about the need to tell abused women's stories, I obtained the phone number of a woman who coordinated support programs for battered women at a local social service agency. I'll call her Mary.

Mary and I met in her dark and cramped office on the fifth floor of a very tired looking office building. Believing Mary to be the "expert," I was anxious about whether I would sound knowledgeable enough to be considering such research. Despite my anxiety, I managed to articulate my interest in writing the stories of some abused women and asked her advice. Mary was supportive and encouraging. We spent an hour discussing her program and how it worked toward helping women understand abuse and how society tacitly supports it.

Mary offered me the opportunity to attend a 12-week support group session that was scheduled to begin in two months. She also suggested that I meet with some of the participants in her current support group and agreed to ask the women in the group if they would allow me into the group to make my request. We both thought that this would work towards grounding my research in the lived experiences of some abused women.

A week later I found myself facing a group of 10 women who were attending the second phase of a three phase support group for abused women. Mary introduced me as a graduate student who was writing a thesis about women's experience of abuse. Then she gave me the floor.

Once again I was nervous. I thought that I knew what I wanted to say, but as I looked around at the faces in the room, my mind went blank. I wanted to let these women know I didn't want to study "them" but rather wanted to learn from

their experiences. Trying to be conscious of my language, I managed to tell them who I was and that I wanted to talk to one or two of them so that I could frame my understanding of spousal abuse.

Two days later, Mary phoned me with the name and phone number of one woman willing share her experiences with me. I contacted Gina, a 42-year-old mother of three, who had recently left a 10-year abusive relationship. We arranged to meet the next day and for safety reasons, we met at the social service agency where the support group was held.

We began by discussing the weather, our children and the poor quality of the coffee from the cafeteria downstairs. Then we began to discuss how Gina could help me. I reminded her that I was interested in her story of her experience of abuse. I told her that I hoped to write a thesis that presented the stories of some battered women and that I was listening to her story as a way of initiating some basic understanding of women's experiences of abuse. I was about to go on when Gina interrupted:

> You sounded like you needed educating. Something you said when you came to the group just didn't sit right with me. You seemed like you were sincere and were trying hard, but your words said more than you may have realized . . . I remember you saying that you were interested in our own understanding of the battering relationship and "how we had gotten ourselves into it."

Gina looked me in the eye and continued:

> I thought to myself, she's just like the rest of "them." She blames me. I decided that first thing I wanted you to understand is that abuse is not the woman's fault.

My stomach turned and my palms felt damp. How could I say such a thing? I silently chastised myself. I had been reading "the" books, all the "right" literature about abuse. I'd read Walker and MacLeod who emphasize that the victim is not to blame and that society's attitudes can actually support abuse. I'd even told other people how "they" (people in society) often blame the victim, which is wrong. How did the "they" become me?

So my session with Gina started with an apology. I felt that this incident gave me more reason to conduct my study than all the search of the literature that I could possibly complete. I realized that if I am so shaped by society's messages that I speak to battered women with insensitivity and without a sense of commonality, then this research would at its minimum serve as special learning for me.

I decided that I should attend the 12-week support group, as Mary had suggested, and I have written a little about my experience in the first chapter of this thesis. I also attended a drop-in group that some battered women themselves had organized. All in all, this pre-research lasted eight months. Like my interview with Gina, the group experiences solidified my commitment to situate my research within my own story and the stories of some abused women.

In keeping with feminist research practices, I saw the research process as participatory and collaborative. Feminist participatory research does not distinguish between the researcher and those participating in the research. Thus, there are five people in this research who are at once co-researchers and participants. Although I consider the terms as interchangeable, it was confusing to

write the connecting stories as if the terms were one and the same. For the sake of clarity I use the term participants to refer to the four women who shared their stories with me. I use co-researchers to mean all of us, and "researcher" to refer to myself.

Diane, Kate, Michelle, and Lynn were the four women who told me their stories. Two of them, Diane and Lynn, I met through the support groups. The other two, Kate and Michelle, heard of my research through friends of mine and volunteered to participate. All but Kate have been involved in support groups for abused women.

I began the interview process in October, 1993. I met with each participant at least twice. The first session, or storytelling interview, was modeled after the process that Belenky and her colleagues (1986) used in their research concerning women's ways of knowing.

> Before asking a woman to participate, we told her that we were interested in her experience – and in women's experience – because it had so often been excluded as people sought to understand human development. We told her that we wanted to hear what was important about life and learning *from her point of view*. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 11)

I asked my co-researchers to tell me the story of their experience of abuse and their decision to leave. I told them there was no right or wrong way to relate their story, just their way. I asked them if their stories had been shaped by society. I queried them about their decision to leave and what learning was important in making that decision.

The second interview (for Kate and Diane the third interview because they required two storytelling interviews) consisted of presenting my written story of their story, and asking them to review it and make comments. After they read the stories and gave me their feedback, we discussed the process. I invited them to write anything that they felt might be important about the process or anything they wanted included in the research. To date, one has chosen this option. I also shared with them any parts of the connecting story where I used their words to emphasize a point or theory. I have incorporated their feedback into the connecting story and also in the last chapter concerning possible action resulting from the study. The entire interviewing process lasted six months.

I wrote the stories in a narrative style, using the transcripts as the data base. I found it impossible to report their stories without filtering them through my own feelings, so I included my reactions in the story. They appear in italics and for continuity, I use italics when telling parts of my own story.

Ethical Guidelines

When I told friends and colleagues that I was writing a thesis about battered women, there was usually an awkward and somewhat uncomfortable pause. It is a "touchy" issue and one that, as the literature reveals, is misunderstood and is filled with treacherous undercurrents. Safety and privacy were very real issues for my co-researchers and I was conscious of ensuring their well-being. I was careful to address issues of confidentiality, informed consent and right to withdraw.

Gaining informed consent is an ethically important part of the research process. Glesne and Peshkin (1992), say that it is even more than that. They state that the although "informed consent neither precludes the abuse of research findings nor creates a symmetrical relationship between the researcher and the research, it can contribute to the empowering of the researched" (p. 111). Since my research looks at how abused women can learn to empower themselves, I was careful to inform them of their rights throughout the process. To do this, I sent an Introductory Letter (Appendix A) to support group members at two Edmonton social service agencies. I identified myself as a student writing a thesis on abuse and some members expressed an interest in acting as co-researchers. As mentioned, two other women heard of my research through word of mouth. I met with those interested and reviewed the purpose and procedures involved in the research. Before each taped interview, I clarified with participants the nature of the study and restated that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out at any time, although no participant exercised this option. Each participant read and signed an Informed Consent (Appendix B) that explained all this.

I asked the participants to choose fictitious names to "protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 117). Two however, felt strongly that they wanted to use their real names, stating that they felt safe enough to do so and that by using their actual names they owned the experience and it felt empowering. In order to ensure the safety of participants we

met at a social service agency that has safety procedures in place. Or, if the participants said they felt safe, we met in my locked office at the university.

All data (tapes and transcripts) were stored in a locked filing cabinet or in a vault in my home. The data were reviewed only by the participants and myself although I used a typist (with the knowledge of the co-researchers) to complete the transcripts of the interviews. She agreed to an assurance of confidentiality. The stories were written with some "changes" to protect the co-researchers, but I was careful not to alter the essence of their stories.

Hearing the Voices

The literature has provided insight into the complexities of spousal abuse. It supports the premise that it is an extensive problem that has educational implications. The severity of the effects of wife-abuse indicate a need for support programs that allow women to break the cycle of violence that has been inflicted on them. The readings suggest there is implicit endorsement within society for women to remain in battering relationships. One way to help battered women move away from their victimization is to focus on the influencing factors that abused women themselves consider as crucial to the decision to stay in, or leave, the battering relationship.

By using the narrative approach to this research, I hoped to reveal what some battered women identify as critical learning that facilitates the ability to leave the abusive relationship. Their stories are important and valid. Their voices need to be heard.

CHAPTER 4

THE VOICES

Diane

Seventeen-year-old Diane believed in fairy tales. Now an adult, Diane remembers that as a teenager she was "naive, naive as you could be." Diane's story is a shadowy piece with treacherous undercurrents. These undercurrents were steeped in notions and concepts of family and married life etched out in her childhood. "I came from a home that was very structured, very strict, but very loving. My father ruled the roost, as I think was common at that time. But if you had a problem where you disagreed with his decision, you could always talk to him," she recalls. The notion of a white knight who could solve problems fit into Diane's understanding of male-female relationships. The fable serves as a metaphor for her vision of herself in those early years.

Diane's voice is low and she begins her story in a matter of fact tone that has another quality I can't quite put my finger on. Her hands cradle a bulky-yellow coffee mug as she begins to share a private and terrifying piece of her life with me. At 44, Diane is no stranger to stress and anxiety. Her round face has a youthful quality, mixed with a few lines that won't let her forget the memory of living in a 17-year abusive relationship.

We are both feeling our way through this first session as we work through some semblance of what academics call "the process." I hear myself say, "We're just going to wing it together and see how we come out with what you, Diane, think is important for me to know about your experience of being abused by your husband." I

think this sounds wordy and worry that it is stilted. Diane appears relaxed and it balances my nervousness.

In 1966, the world was witnessing the Vietnam War, an event with far-reaching repercussions. In 1966, Diane met Jerry, a meeting with consequences she could never have imagined. Jerry was a neighbour and his sister was a friend of Diane's mother. Diane remembers her mother and Jerry's sister were bowling partners, so it was not surprising the two young people should meet. "We sort of stumbled into the relationship, I guess." She describes Jerry as very attractive, outgoing, bubbly, worldly and charming. "All the things that I wasn't."

Diane, still in high school, was impressed with Jerry who was 10 years her senior. She found herself deferring to him and trying hard to please:

> If we were going to a movie we'd go where he wished. If we were going out to dinner, he would order for me. I have a problem to this day going to a restaurant and somebody throws a menu in my face and I'm going, "Oh, oh, now what do I do?" The people at work are really great. What they do is say, "Diane, we're going out for lunch today. Want to come? We're going to Boston Pizza. The menu is in the drawer." And they just let it go. And I go get the menu and I can think about it all morning. Otherwise I just sit there and everyone else will be finished and I still haven't made up my mind what I want to order. I lost a lot of those skills.
>
> Yeah . . . he just took them from me and I permitted it to happen. But I thought, "Well, he's paying for this you know."

Diane didn't see the subdued message of control at the time. She now calls the relationship controlling, but at the time was pleased to have her "knight" decide for her. Jerry told her how to dress and how to style her hair. He couched his controlling behaviour as wanting the best for her and wanting her to be the best she could be.

The three-year courtship was a blueprint for the 14-year marriage. Although Diane says there was no physical violence in the prenuptial years, looking back, she sees some warning signs. Their relationship, she remembers:

> wasn't being harmful to me as I saw it then. It was very controlling but I thought it was a minor thing. He never hit me. He never threatened to hit me. Like . . . I wasn't fearful of him. And . . . but he was very controlling. So I took that as something concrete. And we ended up getting married.

It took Jerry exactly one day to move from psychological control to physical violence. The day after they wed, the couple was to attend an open house at Diane's parent's home. Many relatives and friends were to share in a present-opening party. Diane, admittedly tired, nonetheless prepared to go. For seemingly no reason, Jerry announced he was no longer interested in attending the affair. They argued and that was "the first time he hit me."

Embarrassed and confused, Diane tried to convince Jerry to attend the celebration. It was to be the first of many occasions that she excused with lies and cover-ups. It was the beginning of her cover story.

Diane: He didn't want to go so I went by myself and eventually he came. Of course I had black eye by this time.

Kathy: So he hit you before you went?

Diane: Yeah. And that should have clued me in. But it didn't. And everyone said, "What happened to you?" and I said, "Well you know me, I walked into the door frame." And everyone bought it because I was never a liar and none of my family was used to lies. I was also known for being kind of klutzy. So they bought into it.

Kathy: Did he suggest that you lie?

Diane: No. He basically and very calculatingly said, "Do you know what your father will do to you if he finds out what you did that made it

so that I would have to hit you?" So he twisted it all around so that he made me think that maybe it was my fault.

Kathy: So in your mind you felt that you had done something to deserve this?

Diane: I must have, but darned if I could remember what it was. But . . . yes, I thought that maybe I had. And I . . . I mean we had company from England over and it was a monstrous wedding so I mean you don't put on a big scene.

Diane describes how she felt the need to save face and not embarrass herself or her parents. She fell into the lies that she saw as the only way to keep up appearances.

Diane: It fit with me and it was easy. It was an easy way to get out of it . . . for me . . . it wasn't painful. It was almost like it did happen that way. I wanted to believe that."

Kathy: You almost talked yourself into believing that it happened that way. On some level it was sort of your reality.

Diane: On some level . . . that's true.

Perhaps Diane could not entirely convince herself the lie was in fact the truth, but she managed to put Jerry's behaviour down to overtiredness and stress from the wedding festivities. They went on a three-week honeymoon that Diane remembers with fondness.

On the surface their early married years were not unlike those of many newlyweds at the time. Both partners worked but Jerry controlled the money. "All the money went into a pot. His pot." Jerry parcelled out money to Diane in dribs and drabs. He insisted she take a bag lunch to work and bought her sets of tickets for the transit. Diane didn't have her own bank account and relied on Jerry to supply her with any financial resources she required. Diane recalls having an

inkling this wasn't quite right. "It didn't feel right but it wasn't the horror stories that I heard on television. I thought it odd but not odd enough."

As we continue our conversation I notice Diane's coffee cup remains untouched. The room is stuffy and the air seems thicker than when we first entered. I see the coffee in Diane's saffron-coloured mug is skimming over with a fine film. I have the urge to dump it out, pour a new cup, let that mug brim with fresh brew. Diane seems not to notice and leans forward a little, as if to ensure my attention.

Her voice remains calm and straightforward as if by composure she can buff the reality of her experience. Her story takes on a different texture as she traces the path of Jerry's controlling actions and frames an image of their life together.

It was after the birth of their first child that Jerry began to abuse Diane physically. He was impatient with the baby and he seemed easily irritated by her crying. When the little girl threw temper tantrums, Jerry would blame them on Diane, saying she was crazy like her mother. Diane remembers him saying things like, "That kid is crazy. It must run in the family. That's your side of the family." Put-downs and name-calling escalated to violent acts.

> He had started after Mary. It got to the point not where I was hospitalized or anything like that but to the point where I was pinched and shoved and poked and . . . I did end up with bruises and I knew it wasn't right and he'd always apologize – he'd had a rough day or something like that.

When Diane tried to confide in her mother she received little sympathy. On the surface, Jerry seemed a great guy. He could be relied on to fix a neighbour's broken carburetor or build the local skating rink. Diane's mother and

neighbours seemed unable to envision the dark side in such a helpful guy. Diane began to think perhaps Jerry was right. She was crazy.

> Occasionally I would confide in somebody . . . just little crumbs to see their reaction. And they would just go, "Like I don't understand Diane. I hear what you're saying but I just don't buy it. I know the man. It's just too hard to believe," they'd say.

Diane recalls some family stories scripted with plots that reinforced Jerry's contention that she was crazy. Diane recalls hearing about her grandmother having a mental breakdown. Jerry told Diane that her mother asked him to "watch me carefully because she didn't want the same thing to happen to me." She began to doubt her own sanity.

The arrival of Diane's second child fuelled Jerry's abusive behaviour. Tom was a charming baby, who differed from their daughter in temperament and in looks. So different were they that Jerry accused Diane of sleeping around. He claimed Tommy as his own but insisted Mary was another man's child. He relentlessly belittled Diane and Mary and favoured Tom. Two years later another son, Kerry, arrived and Jerry's incubated violence was to find release.

Diane felt bound and tethered to her domestic life. Nothing she or the oldest and youngest children could do would satisfy Jerry. Increasingly demanding, he set the household rules and Diane was expected to maintain them. His alcohol consumption grew and magnified his violent tantrums. Pushing and shoving gave way to full-out beatings.

As Diane speaks I become aware of my own breathing. Her story bites deeply into me. It's a physical reaction that perhaps symbolizes my own fears. I glance out

the window and hear the squeal of tires and the incessant sound of a driver hitting a car horn over and over. I almost miss her next words.

> Alcohol gave him the excuse to do it. He almost killed our daughter. Mary must have been in junior high maybe 13, 14 somewhere in there. And I was at work and I was working shifts. I got home from work and the house was dead quiet. Jerry was sitting in the recliner. One of those Lazy Boy things. It used to be his. He had his bum print in there. I mean it was his chair. And he was sitting there and there wasn't . . . I couldn't hear anything in the house. And finally I . . . eh . . . came in and he was just sitting there fuming. And yet looking sheepish. You know like woe is me and how dare you make me so angry, you know, like now look what you made me do, this kind of thing. And I found Kerry and he was just sitting on the sofa shaking like this (makes a shaking movement). Tom was in his room with his head down. Mary was in her room crying but wouldn't tell me what was wrong. She asked if Dad were still home. That clued me into that something was happening here. But Mary wanted to let it drop so I did.

In the morning Diane got ready for work and went through the motions of getting the kids off to school. Once Jerry was gone she questioned her children, trying to make sense of the previous evenings events. Piece by piece Diane untangled her children's story.

> Jerry made macaroni and hotdogs for the kids. There's nothing wrong with that. Mary is allergic to mustard. She gets mustard on her mouth and she goes like this (gestures a swelling of the mouth). So she says, "Dad, I can't eat mustard, remember?" He says, "You will eat this damn mustard" and he started smearing it all over the hotdog. He handed it to her and she just picked it up and said, "If you like mustard so damn much then you eat it," and she winged it at him. Tom said that Jerry just calmly got up from his chair, pushed it in, wiped the mustard off himself, cleaned up around, went over and picked her up by the neck and hauled her off her chair and put her on the ground and started choking her. Kerry got out of his chair. He was the youngest. He jumped on Jerry's back as he was on the floor choking Mary. Kerry screamed and hollered and bit and pulled hair and hit until Jerry picked up Kerry and just threw him against the wall.

Diane's voice sinks in pitch and volume. Her eyes dart toward me, as if to ensure I am concentrating on her story. We meet each other's gaze and we both look away as if to refocus the painful memories. We let the silence grow.

My own thoughts start to cloud my mind. I am conscious of catching my lower lip in my teeth. A part of me wants to understand Diane's experience while another me wants to block her voice, keep it at bay, protect myself from knowing her reality.

Outside, an autumn moon hangs in a cloudy sky, its shadowy face anticipating the wintry season at hand. Windy air seeps through the sliding glass door that separates us from the chilled outdoors. Diane, her hands restless and fidgety, breaks the uneasy quiet.

Diane: I got to know some social workers because this was the department I worked for and we worked in the same building. I got to know quite a bit about the legal system and I had this one group of about five women that work in the same office and they covered for me more times than you know. They covered my desk.

Kathy: When what?

Diane: They could see that I was at work physically but I sure wasn't there mentally. Umm . . . because of something that happened the night before.

Kathy: Tell me about what happened. What kinds of things were going on with you and Jerry then?

Diane: He would burn me. He . . . ahh . . . he

Kathy: How was he burning you?

Diane: With cigarettes.

Kathy: Were you just sitting there?

Diane: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Kathy: And he would just come along with a cigarette?

Diane: Yeah. Yeah. Or I would be sleeping and . . . uhh . . . He would be working out of town on occasion and he sewed my vagina up with a leather lacing.

Kathy: What?

Diane: Yeah of course that pain made me pass out.

Her words seem incredible to me. How can this happen? The sheer physical logistics are lost on me and I crave to understand. Such violence should be avoidable I think, and I share this with Diane.

Her voice has a chilling edge to it, as she explains that Jerry, experienced in leather crafting, had tools that would allow him to perform the "surgery." "He had needles. He had the awl that went with it," she whispered. While Diane slept, Jerry inserted the first painful stitch. I hear Diane utter a sob.

I ask her if she was hospitalized, if there were scars, and didn't her doctors notice anything out of the ordinary "down there"? I want to frame this experience in some kind of linear way–some way with terms and prescriptions. I need to hear that this was outrageous and that she had some alternatives.

Instead I hear that Diane's psyche repressed the event. "Actually, I didn't remember it until about two years ago. I was sitting in this pizza joint with a friend. For some strange reason it came back to me and I told her about it." She laughs nervously about the inappropriateness of the setting for such a revelation.

Sexual perversions were common place in the relationship, Diane recalls. Jerry's "lovemaking" included the use of bottles and wanting her to have sex with other men while he watched. Beatings during sex were common place.

Humiliation and shame were integral parts of the sexual act. Diane thinks Jerry wanted to "humiliate and shame me into staying with him." She believes his thoughts were that no man would want to touch her after the things she had endured with him.

The bedroom was to be the scene for one of the most terrifying nights of the couple's troubled and turbulent marriage. The two older kids were sleeping on the lower level. Young Kerry was at a weekend camp sponsored by the local hospital program where he was receiving treatment. Jerry had fallen asleep after a night of heavy drinking. Tired, Diane headed up to bed and prayed he was drunk enough to stay passed out downstairs for the duration of the night. She had barely dozed off when she awoke with a start. "I saw this shadow in the bedroom door," she remembers, "and I heard these strange noises–like metal on metal."

She heard Jerry's voice. "I think it's time to play some games. We haven't played this game before. I have a gun here," he growled. "These are bullets."

Diane heard the bullets click as Jerry inserted them methodically into the chamber. "He'd put them in, he'd spin the chamber, you could hear him do all that stuff."

For the entire weekend Jerry held her captive and repeated the "game" of Russian roulette. Diane, deprived of sleep and mentally exhausted, could offer little resistance. She vowed to herself that she would leave him the next day.

But escape was not that easy. Jerry was in tune with Diane's priorities. He knew she would never leave without the children. Diane went to work hoping to get the children from school and find a safe place to hide out. Jerry kept the

children home from classes knowing when Diane discovered they were not in school, she would be forced to return home.

Jerry resumed the "game." For three more terrorizing nights Diane endured Jerry's death threats.

> And then we started again. I'd never been so terrified in my life. This feeling of that after four nights of no sleep, and going to work in the daytime, or working at home and no sleep, and you'd feel yourself drifting off, and you'd just be a target. And you'd feel this cold gun on your head and hear the chamber spinning and the trigger.

On the fifth night circumstances were to change. Diane recalls she must have had a few rare moments of sleep when she was awakened by the feeling of the bed vibrating. Jerry was convulsing in an alcoholic seizure. Diane seized the moment and the gun. She stood, pointing it at Jerry, intending to kill him.

> I took the gun out of his hand and I stood at the foot of the bed and I just pointed it right at him. And I was going to kill him. I believed there were bullets in the gun. And I watched myself as if I was outside of my own body. I watched myself in my mind pull that trigger. I watched the bullet go and I watched him die It was like, so I'm out of here. So I took the gun and I went downstairs and I was half dressed–like mostly dressed but I still didn't have shoes on and that was October and I went out to the shed. I am looking through the shed and I'm looking for a shovel. I buried the gun in the flower bed. Wrapped it in a plastic bag and I buried it there. Then I went upstairs and made sure that he was still there, and yeah, he was still having the seizure, tongue out and everything.

Diane quietly and hurriedly woke the children and packed a few things in a bag for them. She told them they were leaving, and they did just what she asked. Before taking them to school she remembers stopping at McDonald's for breakfast, "just like we were a 'normal' family."

> I went to work. The kids went to school. This man is laying in his bed. I never gave him another thought. That was it. I had killed him as far as I was concerned. He was dead to me.

Diane's words have a distant tone. I find myself aware of her use of the third person. Perhaps it distances her from the horrors of her experience. Perhaps the use of "you" is meant to engulf me, make me connect, allow me to understand. And it does.

However, the story does not die, nor did Jerry. The claws of his brutality reached farther than even Diane could imagine. She shares with me another day she will never forget. It occurred one year before the day she left for good.

Diane tells me about an afternoon in late fall, when she was driving through busy city traffic. Mary, her oldest and Kerry, the youngest child, were riding in the rear seat. Suddenly, without warning, Kerry grasped the door handle in his tiny, eight-year-old hand. Before anyone realized what was happening, Kerry was part-way out of the vehicle. In a reflex action, Mary grabbed hold of her brother and yanked him back into the moving automobile. Kerry resisted and kicked and bit Mary. He drew blood. Mary fought him off and managed to keep him somewhat subdued. Diane made a decision.

Kerry had been receiving treatment as an outpatient at a hospital specializing in psychiatric therapy. He was having serious difficulties with school, yet the educational system could not identify just where his problem lay. Diane says, "I'd been talking to a psychiatrist for a long time because they kept telling me at school that he was a behaviour problem. But this kid wasn't a behaviour problem, he was so withdrawn, he was like a vegetable. He was like part of a

pattern on the sofa." Eventually, he was referred to specialized treatment at the hospital.

With Kerry screaming and Mary sobbing tearfully, Diane determined to head for the hospital, not really sure what she would do, but knowing that she had reached a point of no return.

They were a bedraggled threesome when they arrived at the hospital, Mary bleeding from Kerry's fierce bite. Kerry's face beet red. And Diane a wreck, from trying to avoid an accident while the two youngsters struggled in the back seat.

> So we look a mess, and I walk right into the hospital and this big conference – our doctor, all the other psychiatrists, medical psychologists and key workers were there. There's these oak doors and I just walk in. Like with Kerry in tow. He's got tears and he's red from where Mary grabbed him and all this stuff. I just put him in the chair, and he sat there. Just like a little rag doll – just sat there. He weighed about 40 pounds, at his age – he was just a tiny thing.
>
> And they said, "What can we do for you? This is a private meeting."
>
> And I said, "I'm not taking my son out of here. He's going to kill himself," and I told them what had happened.
>
> And they said, "Oh, you can't do that."
>
> I said, "Yes I can." And I left Kerry and I walked away. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do. He kept sitting there. He didn't run to the car. He didn't even get up off the chair. He just sat there and sobbed. Just sobbed.

Diane's voice is halting and I feel myself shudder. I want to normalize this, shape it so I can understand, relate, capture its essence. Her child has provided the impetus towards action. This small, quivering boy with his life at stake, awakens

Diane and she "knows" what to do. Her inner power is activated and she knows something must be done. It took her a year to do it.

During that year, Kerry was a patient in a long term, in-hospital treatment program. The first thing Diane did on the day she left Jerry for good was rush to the hospital and tell her youngest son they were all leaving his father. She remembers her sad, little boy looked at her, with the first glimmer of hope she had seen in three years. Kerry simply said, "What took you so long?" His words were crucial in fortifying her decision to leave Jerry.

Diane's decision to leave created a turning point in Kerry's therapy. Through hypnosis, he recalled events that he had previously blocked. He described his own private hell that occurred when Diane was at work and he was in the care of his father.

> His dad would tie him to his bed and, of course, Kerry would have to go to the bathroom and he'd holler out and his dad wouldn't get up and untie him so Kerry would pee the bed and then he would get a beating for that. But he was tied to the bed so he wouldn't disturb Jerry while he was sleeping off his drunk. Those kinds of things were happening on a regular basis.

When Diane left Jerry she found refuge at a local women's shelter and remained there for the maximum three-week stay. She became part of a support group offered through the facility and for the first time began to recognize the extent of her abuse. The group provided her with a voice and a language that helped to frame her thoughts. She credits it as an important component of the strength she needed to begin to create a life for herself and her three children, a life on their own–a life without Jerry.

Although Diane has managed to live without Jerry for the past nine years (they are divorced and Jerry is twice remarried), he continually tries to exert control over her and her family. His attempts to dominate the family extend from physical threats to property destruction, to psychological ploys. Diane describes an evening of insanity that culminated in Jerry smashing her new car and threatening the family with a gun. Even recently, Diane has returned home to find her mail rearranged alphabetically and Jerry has called her to see if she has noticed. "There would be a message on my machine at home that would say 'Isn't your mail neat?'" Threatening phone calls are common occurrences.

Despite this continual reign of terror, Diane has developed an internal centre of power. She used what happened to her – her experience of abuse – and learned how to empower herself. "It was for me . . . it was a personal, individual learning about abuse . . . and I took responsibility for my safety, the kids' safety." She credits the first support group at the safe house as one of the primary sources of development of this new understanding or knowing. After that initial support group, Diane joined a pilot program that included three phases.

> It was basically a three phase program, with each phase lasting for eight weeks. You did things . . . thinking. It was called thinking and you labelled abuse and you learned the language of abuse. You learned the cycle of violence. You learned the theory. The second one was feelings. So once you learned the words, and yes you really were abused, or no you weren't – whatever the case may be – but we all seemed to fall into, yes, we were. Then we learned the feelings that were attached to that. I feel guilty or I feel ashamed. I feel angry or I'm grieving the loss of my dreams for myself and my kids and those kinds of things. And then I started things with advocacy. That's the third phase. And that's how the drop-in centre started, out of that. So we learned – think, feel, act. The three ways that motivate people. I mean you have to think it through. Then you

> have to feel and then – in your heart – and then you have to act on it. So I went through phase three and decided right from the beginning that we [herself and another member of the group] wanted some sort of drop in centre. It was to be a support group that did not require an eight-week commitment. Just come if you want and you can. No hard and fast rules about attendance.

For Diane, important learning occurred through collaboration. She says her ability to remain out of her abusive relationship is related to what she calls a "partnership" with other women. These partnerships were informal during the beginning stages of her permanent separation from Jerry. Jerry's sister was the first person to acknowledge Diane's abusive relationship with Jerry. Her recognition assisted Diane in finding a voice.

Support from a social worker facilitated further learning for Diane.

Diane: This social worker has opened me up to all sorts of things. She took us as a group so we were subject to a whole variety of different theories and different things and we would sit and talk about it and we'd debrief after we would see a film. We just learned.

Kathy: And were they educational films, or what?

Diane: Oh, some were like *Shirley Valentine*. Some were educational. We watched a film at the very early stages of our drop-in group and we still needed support and we were still growing and learning. It was about a teacher in the fifties in the States who is trying to teach kids about racism. So one day all the blue-eyed kids could have the water fountain and the brown-eyed kids couldn't play on the swings and teeter totters. And the next day they switched. And the kids talked about it. Now this teacher was fired and run out of town on a rail and everything else. She was invited back later, after they realized that it was a very successful program. This was an actual film of her in the '50s doing this with real kids. It wasn't a dramatization or anything. So it was those kinds of films and then we would talk about it. And that's where I learned equality is the same thing. Except . . . we can have brown eyes, we can have blue eyes, but we don't have penises. People with penises get the water fountain and play on the equipment. People without penises can't do that.

So collaborative talking and finding voice were important components of the learning Diane experienced. She believes they were integral to her ability to remain outside the abusive relationship. She speaks further about her relationship with this social worker:

Diane: She wasn't just teaching me, we were teaching each other. It was a mutual learning. She may have a master's degree, and. . . .

Kathy: But she doesn't have your experience.

Diane: That's right. So she learns from me and I learn from her. So that's what we found with giving the training sessions. [They jointly provide training sessions concerning spousal abuse].

Everybody thought she was out-to-lunch taking these abused women out to training sessions. What if they say the wrong thing?

Kathy: So together you were the experts?

Diane: That's right. Exactly. So we go into it as a partnership.

Kathy: So then partnership and equality are important to your learning?

Diane: No kidding!

Diane's experience in an abusive relationship kept her marooned. Marooned from her friends and family and marooned from herself. Through connections with other women she began to reconnect. By connecting with other women, she was able to rescue herself. Supportive women helped her find her own voice and now Diane spends much of her time speaking for battered women.

She talks about the importance of advocating on behalf of abused women as part of her ongoing learning process. Her voice is heard in training programs for the city police and for the RCMP. She made a presentation to her daughter's university class.

Through learning a language with which to express herself she is able to take responsibility for herself. Her voice has found resonance and form. Together with the voices of other women her story helps to broaden my understanding of the complex issue of spousal abuse.

Kate

To look at her you'd guess she was 35 or so, with short cropped, almost boy-like hair. By anyone's definition she'd be called a beauty, dark eyed and fresh looking, with skin the colour of ivory. You'd be hard pressed to find a tell-tale wrinkle or sagging jaw. Not even her voice betrays her age or her past circumstances. It's a clear voice with a definitive edge that resonates self-confidence. It's not the voice of a 47-year old woman who lived for 27 years in an oppressive and psychologically-abusive relationship.

Our conversation begins with qualifiers, words that temper the label of psychological abuse. "I find the word abuse, you know, you automatically think of physical abuse and . . . it is sort of hard to describe your life in terms of being abused," she says. However, as we move in our dialogue, weave in and out of our exchange, psychological abuse is what Kate describes and psychological abuse is the label she employs. "In retrospect, I see the relationship as terribly destructive, definitely abusive."

Kate is introspective as she begins to share her story with me. She has searched for reasons that might explain why she remained in her marriage for those 20 plus, debilitating years. She recalls name calling and demeaning language as commonplace in her relationship with her husband, Norman:

> When I was thinking back about the relationship that I had – the name calling and, you know, the beginning of chipping away of self-esteem . . . of being called names whenever something went wrong. You know, even in front of the children or whatever. You know the most awful names. So that the underlying message was stupid, was dumb, and that kid can't survive because you're so stupid. And . . . ummm . . . when I was thinking about that, then I began to think back when I was a kid, why did I take it? Because in a lot of ways I'm a really strong person – opinionated and, you know, I'm not a wimp. So I'm asking myself why did I stay for so very long? I obviously wasn't happy. I wasn't getting anything out of it. I hated it. And yet I stayed. That's when I went back to my family. I began to think about what was in my background you know, when I was really young . . . made me think that maybe this [the marriage] was maybe not OK, but this is life.

An early memory provides Kate with a metaphorical explanation. She recalls a childhood incident at elementary school. Her teacher was reading the class a story about the motto, "Don't cry over spilt milk." To Kate this was an absolutely bizarre concept. In her family, if a child accidentally spilt milk, the response from her parents would be, "You stupid cow."

> There was always tears over spilt milk. It was something my parents would never have said. They would have insulted me. They would have chipped away at me as a person . . . that there was something intrinsically wrong with me because I knocked over a glass of milk. So that was really a unique concept and I remember it stuck in my mind. Just like, "wow there are people who don't go crazy if a kid spills milk."

For Kate, her upbringing conditioned her for her married life. Her parents' attitudes shaped her relationship expectations and modelled her future relationship. "The same way as my mother taught me how to make a vinegarette . . . She taught me, she and my father taught me, that verbal abuse was part of a normal human relationship. It was a truism. It was just part of life."

Kate uses vivid language and imagery and I feel surprised a woman this articulate felt voiceless for so many years. I am listening and observing while she unearths fragments of her past and at the edge of every experience I am struck by something that rings a bell, that connects. But I refocus on our conversation and hope that I can retrieve these thoughts for my narrative.

Kate married at an early age. Norman was two years her senior and was from a prominent family. He had social status, was a successful scholar, and a recognized highschool athlete. At 18, Kate found herself pregnant and remembers feeling marriage to Norman would transport her from a home life she found stifling. "I thought I picked a partner as far away from my background, not that I did this consciously but, you know, there was certainly nothing about my future husband that reminded me of my father. So I thought I was safe." She was to discover the opposite.

I notice Kate's tone seems strained, just a little less forceful than when we started. She uses her hands to emphasize her thoughts, and the combination of softer voice and emphatic gestures seem at odds. Her legs steadily and fluidly cross and uncross, distracting me. I wonder if there are some shreds of language I missed, let escape or were plucked away by my temporary distraction.

Kate talks of feeling valueless in her relationship. Norman was the breadwinner and, although he was relatively generous, there was guilt attached to her spending money. "I had in some way to deserve the money I spent. I felt it was his money – his living – and I was parasitic. I had to be an extra good person in order to earn my keep." Norman used money to control Kate. She had a notion

to attend university but Norman was not willing to spend the money. "And if he wasn't willing to spend it, then it wasn't going to be available." She remembers an incident that underscores this attitude.

> Money was everything. I remember . . . later on, years ago . . . right in front of a good friend of mine – a couple. They were there in the evening for dinner with us. And my husband had the audacity to say . . . I mentioned something about the value of my time . . . and he looked at me and said, "I get paid $200 an hour. What do you get paid?" So therefore he was saying that my time was obviously worthless compared to his. Because he was better than me. All of his self-esteem, everything that he was, was obviously in his earning potential. And his idea of a provider was, a controller. He was a man who knew his place so that he could keep other people in theirs.

Kate repeats the phrase "no value, no value." Norman did not value anything that involved Kate. Her ideas, her creativity, everything she did was useless because it did not translate into money. Norman devalued her homemaker role and she felt she was worthless.

> I was a homemaker. That was my job. And he never said I was doing a good job or a bad job. Imagine working for years at something without input, without any feedback or recognition. You feel pretty useless.

Kate's voice vibrates and its tone, sharper and edged, sets the circumference of her abusive experience. Money played a significant role in their marriage and Kate recalls being a victim of her lack of earning capacity. Norman felt his earning power ensured his overall power in their relationship and he never missed an opportunity to belittle Kate. When Kate attempted to exert some of her own power, he would tell her, "If you don't like it, get out and see how you'll live then."

Kate believes it was economics that held her in this less than satisfactory union. She talks about her inability to leave.

> It's the same way when someone is beating you over the head with a club. Other people who have never been beat over the head with a club say, "Well, why didn't you leave?" But it wasn't an option for me. I felt if I left I would be on welfare.

The lack of viable options kept Kate powerless to move out of the relationship. In retrospect she muses, "Of course there were options but I didn't see them."

However Kate did exercise an option. She became pregnant again with her third child, because "It was all I could think of." At this time, Norman's economic success was at its peak and Kate enjoyed an even-better standard of living, appreciating a new home and private clubs. "There was absolutely no incentive for me to begin to think about my future, which is stupid but there it is."

The birth of their third child signalled a change in the marriage. Norman lost any sexual interest in Kate and bluntly told her, not only was he turned off by her, but he found her repulsive. Kate recalls that painful time:

> He just turned off me. And not just turned off but repulsed. So needless to say, that really took my libido and smashed it against the wall. So now I'm left with nothing, right? Now, you're asking yourself, why didn't I just leave? Well, I had this third baby. I had this other child. I had a very affluent lifestyle. So, I thought, "Well, maybe it will get better. Maybe I can win him over. Maybe I can seduce him." Because, of course, the whole thing was my problem, my fault. It had everything to do with me. It had nothing to do with him. It was me that was somehow out of whack. So, of course I tried everything.

Kate shrugs her shoulders and raises her hands, as if in complacency. The room is large, with a panoramic view. I see that the day is at that halfway place between light and dark, that limbo point that feels as if it could go either way, good

or bad, or maybe somewhere in between. Her description of this private episode in her life blurs the outlines of abuse, I think to myself. Is abuse something we "grade," mark off in some measured way, categorize so one "type" of abuse is somehow less excusable than others? As I write and frame Kate's narrative, I feel at once inside and outside her story.

Norman never lost an opportunity to insult Kate. He constantly belittled her about her appearance and told her that she was stupid. "His language was so ugly – everything was ugly. It was like shooting a squirrel with a nuclear missile. You know, his reactions to things." He told her she was fat, and his total lack of physical interest in her caused her to retreat into herself. She deadened herself so there could be no more hurting.

However, it was not Kate who was dead, it was the relationship that was lifeless. It had stagnated and deteriorated so profoundly the two merely co-habited, as if they were room mates. Kate began to assess her position and learned something from self-reflection.

> I learned that I was cheating myself by thinking that this man that I was married to was justified in deciding to exercise power over me by telling me I was repulsive, ugly, stupid, useless and that I had no earning power. I had no value as far as he could see. He had convinced me that I was sexless. He managed to convince me that I was basically worthless, a repulsive package, that I had nothing to offer anyone. Once I realised that this was about power and control, I began to take some control back. I took some power away from him. Then I inadvertently woke up my libido. I had gone for weeks where I had not contacted friends or anything. I was totally isolated. And then I began to reach out and share myself with people. And I wanted people to talk to me. And as a result I became more interesting, I suppose. I became involved in an affair and that I guess was the awakening of the learning that all the things I thought I had put behind me really weren't behind me. I was intelligent. I

> was attractive. I had power. I could live by myself. I would rather live by myself than live . . . than go back to this sort of dead . . . so I decided to leave. And I did.

Kate set up her own apartment. Her two older children were now independent and her youngest child remained with Norman.

Kate pauses and looks straight at me and then quickly averts her eyes to the darkened sky outside. As I chronicle Kate's experience I am reminded of the words of Carol Shields in her novel The Stone Diaries, *"The real troubles in this world tend to settle on the misalignment between men and women. Men it seemed to me were uniquely honoured by the stories that erupted in their lives, whereas women were more likely to be smothered by theirs" (Shields, 1993, p.121).*

But Kate did not allow her story to smother her or swallow her up. Nor did she permit the weight of her story to silence her. She did not lose herself to her story. She recognized Norman's reality was not her reality.

> When I finally left I took nothing but my self esteem, which I packed up in a cardboard box and ran like hell with. It rattled around in there emptily. So there I was. I left and he continued not taking me seriously. Not . . . seeing things as they really were. Pretending they were something else. You know, living a myth . . . living this idea . . . whatever it was we had rather than seeing the reality of it. His view was . . . something entirely different than what was happening for us.

Kate, an analytical and introspective person, identified multiple learning factors that contributed to the formation of her relationship with Norman. At the outset of our conversation, she reasoned their respective family stories played themselves out in their relationship. She believes both she and Norman's role models were stereotypical of the times – the male breadwinner and the female

homemaker. However, her story of the learning that supports these roles has a plot that was well scripted by their social world.

> I think our society outlined male and female positions. A successful man had a woman who stayed at home and raised the children and the man could not be called on to do anything. Men . . . certain men . . . loved children and wanted to spend time with their own children . . . they existed. But society certainly never told them to do it. And if a man got over zealous in that area, that is, helping his wife, taking too active a part in child care, his compatriots . . . his peer group . . . even women would look at him as if something were amiss. Our society encouraged the separation of the man's world and the woman's world. And even women who were educated fell into that.

Kate felt her life taking shape within the setting and plot that society outlined. The media, commercials on television, literature, and magazine articles all perpetuated the concept of the ideal family. Kate believes the media messages accent societal attitudes. She asks me if I remember the "famous commercial – ring around the collar." She recreates the scene:

> A woman and a man are at a party and someone comes up to the man and says . . . through this think bubble . . . "Oh my god, he's got ring around the collar!"
>
> The woman follows the other man's eyes to her husband's neck and says, "Oh, He sees Jack's ring around the collar! Oh, my goodness, what have I done wrong?"
>
> No one ever mentions the fact that Jack is a pig and hasn't bothered to wash his neck! You know, somehow it becomes the woman's fault that there is a black ring around the shirt. So we are trapped in attitudes.
>
> I didn't know what was wrong in my marriage, which is why I was so confused and stayed for so long. I kept thinking, if I could just get the ring away from around my marriage (she laughs) . . . somehow if I used the right detergent, perfume, eye liner, did the right sit ups. You know, did something right . . . .

Society's old story, Kate believes, has echoes that haunt her even today. The set of assumptions that nurtured her belief that she was to blame for the verbal and psychological abuse she experienced has roots in the family, society and its systems.

> And you know what? To some degree I still buy it. That's the fertile ground of the power this guy had over me. It wasn't just him, it was society too. It was everything you saw, looked at, heard and felt. I'm not saying this is the truth. It's my truth. That's how I see it.

Recognition of the power imbalance in her own marriage was an important catalyst for Kate's learning. Her articulation of this power differential is an important component of her ability to learn from her experience.

> Well, this person who is assaulting you in this way, verbally and psychologically, is doing this because they have no other way of exercising their power except through intimidation. So you have to say you won't accept that. Take the power away from them. If you give in, they have found out something that works and the more you give in, the more power you give them. Because when someone calls you names long enough, you begin to believe it. It's a given.

A central issue for Kate, then is taking control or rather, regaining a share of the control in a relationship. She is aware of an association between her individuality, social roles and social institutions. She articulates connections between social forces and her own consciousness.

> It all works together. If, in your most intimate relationship, you are getting the message that you are worthless, that you don't have a voice. And you factor in the messages in society, through the media and in our schooling and in the courts. Then it is difficult to exercise your own power, or even consider it an option.

I watch Kate's lips purse as she continues the narrative that illustrates her understanding of emotional abuse. Her hands punctuate her points, and her voice is

without equivocation. She does not seem mired in her story, but rather comfortable in her own words, satisfied she has finally learned some independence and freedom.

She voices some uneasiness with the term "emotional abuse," restating that it might not be considered as severe as physical battering. She's not sure where to draw the line between a bad relationship and an abusive one. We both conclude abuse is not just physical, it has psychological elements that emphasize a sense of powerlessness. Words can inflict deep wounds that even when healed, leave scars which make "forgiving and forgetting" seem difficult, or even inappropriate.

Michelle

There is no single, dramatic episode that marks the point when Michelle slid into an abusive relationship. "The story is so intertwined, it is like a soap opera to me," she says. Like the other women who have shared their stories with me, Michelle prefaces her narrative with her family story. This first story is, by her account, a fairly standard one. "I grew up in an average middle-class family with no real serious problems until I reached my teenage years. I just didn't get along with my mom and dad, so I left and was placed in a group home for awhile."

At 16, Michelle was placed in a foster home and eventually met and fell in love with Sam, her foster mother's brother. A burly, fun-loving sort, Sam seemed like a giant teddy bear–sensitive, caring and harmless. The relationship began as a friendship and Michelle remembers him as gentle and kind, particularly to his young nieces and nephews. "He was the first man I ever knew who had ever changed a diaper. My father didn't do any of that stuff. My family was very traditional. My mother did all those womanly duties."

Michelle felt Sam was a kindred spirit. He seemed to listen to her and that filled an important need. "It seemed like he was interested in what I had to say and . . . I guess maybe he agreed with me on so much that it seemed like he was listening. We felt kindred."

Michelle and Sam decided to move into Sam's mother's home. They were both 19 years old. Michelle took the opportunity to return to high school in hopes of completing her diploma. As she prepared for her classes, Sam began to undergo a slow, but increasingly-alarming, personality transformation. Fits of jealousy were commonplace and Sam constantly interrogated Michelle about her whereabouts and friendships. She recalls one incident that, in retrospect, she says was a predictor of the violence that was to characterize their life together.

> He just lost it one day over the fact that I had been at school and stayed for an extra hour or something. Sam demanded to know where I was and who I was with, insinuating that I was with people that were a bad influence on me. I was trying to explain that these people were not a bad influence. These are good people.
>
> I didn't understand why he wouldn't listen to me and why he was not interested in my explanation. He just seemed to get angrier and angrier and the next thing I knew, things went flying – objects in the house. He didn't hit me but he threw things and he threatened. The threat was that if I kept doing these things then I was going to get hit.

Michelle's face is tight as she recalls these years. Her gentle features and gracious manner seem false witnesses to her life with Sam. We are meeting in what passes for an office – windowless and rather stifling – with stiff, hard-backed chairs that defy comfort. We met for the first time today, through a mutual friend who attends a women's studies class with Michelle at university. Funny, I think, how

simply the common connection of a shared friend, and a commitment to voice the experience of abuse, promotes a sisterhood.

My mind searches for comparisons. How similar are Diane's, Kate's and Michelle's ordeals? Words like "jealousy" and "education" share places in each of their stories. I wonder if they represent some threads that mesh and knit together to mould a grand narrative. Can these separate lives provide a glimpse of the reality of abuse, or are the "truths lost in the telling and retelling?"

At 19, Michelle was pregnant with the couple's first child. The arrival of their daughter seemed to fuel Sam's possessiveness. The young man, who so gently played with his nieces and nephews, had no time for his own youngster. He blamed Michelle if the baby cried and would scream at her to quiet the infant. Sam required that she ask permission to go out with friends, always maintaining they were a bad influence. "He was jealous of absolutely everything and still had this idea that I didn't understand the world and he had to reinterpret it for me."

Sam was so suspicious of Michelle he insisted on accompanying her wherever she went, whenever he could. She worked at a group home for teenagers and took her daughter with her. Sam found employment at the same home so he could maintain surveillance of Michelle. Their fights became more frequent and Michelle remembers when they reached a violent peak.

> It was about 8:00 at night and we were both in the car. I was driving. We had a fight. I really don't remember what the fight was over but, I was driving him to work. He was a bouncer in a bar at this time. Whatever I had done or said was, at least to him, out of line. He pushed my hands to the side window and broke the window with my head.

> And . . . ah . . . I decided I was going to have some control. I don't remember what we were fighting about but I think it was something sexual because I turned around and said, "I am going to go home and sleep with your brother." And I did. And then he called from work and I told him I did.
>
> I hate vengeful acts . . . but I exerted some control and it sounds sleazy but I was in a position where I felt I had control for a second. His brother left and I went to bed.
>
> Sam came home about 3:00 and he came upstairs with a shotgun. And it was kind of along what you would picture in one of those murder suicide stories, right?
>
> He sat there for about five hours talking to me, telling me how he was going to kill me.

Michelle's daughter, Leanne, was in a bedroom close by, and Michelle worried she might awaken and witness the ordeal. But the little girl remained asleep as Sam maintained his armed vigil. After three or four hours, Sam left the room and headed for the lower level of the house. Michelle, still terrified, lay tense and fearful until morning, unsure where Sam's rage would ultimately lead. As morning arrived, Michelle gathered the courage to tiptoe downstairs and found Sam asleep, the gun clenched in his hand.

Summoning up all her courage, Michelle devised an escape plan. Under the pretence of doing laundry, she packed her and her daughter's personal belongings in laundry baskets and managed to slip out of the house. "I thought doing laundry would please him. I packed up everything I could and put it all in about four laundry baskets – the big ones – and I stuck pictures and everything in the bottom and clothes on top. And I left. I went to a safe place, a shelter, in the suburbs."

Michelle remained at the shelter for the maximum three-week stay. From there she moved to a women's residence and lived in one room with her daughter. She remembers feeling isolated, lonely, depressed and without support:

> Well, I had lost all my friends. I had been isolated from all of them for so long that it was really hard to call any of them. My parents really felt sorry for Sam. Umm . . . I had given them enough problems as a teenager that they really didn't buy that he was abusive. He didn't seem like an abusive guy. And . . . ah . . . so I talked to Sam all the time. He was the only person I had to talk to.
>
> And . . . ah . . . well, I called the shelter a couple of times too, for support, but they were busy people and this was not their fault but I really got the impression really quickly that, you know, I had left there and I was now on my own.

Michelle's language is hesitant and there is a reluctant tone that seems almost apologetic. I observe the line of her shoulders, curled and stooped, as if they were weighted. I am aware of my own body as it edges its way down my chair. I am angled uncomfortably, my feet tensed and turned upward, at right angles with the floor. I take a breath and urge Michelle to continue, knowing I, too, feel some exasperation, guessing at her next revelation.

> They [shelter workers] didn't have much time and I understand that. I really do. But it was really unhealthy because I was really alone. And . . . ah . . . so I saw a lot of Sam. And when I moved out of the women's residence, he moved into the new place with me. I had set up my own place, but we moved into it together.

For two weeks it looked to Michelle as if the renewed relationship would work and she made plans for a happy, family Christmas. Sam had a new position at a meat-packing plant and Michelle remembers feeling hopeful. The dream was short lived. By mid-December the "old" Sam reappeared.

Both Sam and Michelle had been watching an *Oprah Winfrey Show* about women who cheated on their husbands. "And we were watching it together and he started to flip out." Sam had a set of very large and sharp knives he had stolen from work. While the show continued on the television, Sam began to pull the knives methodically out of their storage place and laid them on the counter. Michelle "started to get really scared, but . . . it was not one of those situations where I could walk out the door."

At this moment, the telephone rang. Michelle was to get a reprieve. The call was from Jack, a friend of Sam's, who was calling for a battery boost for his stalled car. Sam ordered Michelle to go out and help his friend. Michelle convinced Jack to return with her to the apartment. Despite Jack's presence, Sam continued to pull out larger and more offensive knives. In fact, Jack's company seemed to give Sam license to verbally abuse his wife. Michelle offered to drive Jack home and, strangely enough, Sam allowed her to leave with Jack.

Jack convinced Michelle to call the police. She was fearful for her daughter and was reluctant to involve the law. But with Jack's support she phoned the police and an officer arrived outside the apartment building. Michelle told him about the guns Sam held in the home and the officer radioed for backup. Two more officers arrived.

> And this one says, "OK. Let's go get your daughter." And I told him that Sam has . . . he has a lot of guns in the pantry which is just inside our door.
>
> And some of the guns were, I found out later, were actually illegal. They were semi-automatic or they were made to be illegal.

> I stood in front of our door with one policeman on either side of it – so that they were visually not apparent. Sam opened the door and pulled me in and sent me flying. And I fell on the floor and he turned his back immediately to the door and I'm on the ground and he went to hit me with his fist when an officer grabbed him from behind.

Michelle rescued her daughter and, with police assistance, found shelter at another safe place in the city. She had learned from her previous escape that she could not have any contact with Sam, as it thwarted her determination to remain out of the abusive relationship.

She applied for, and received, a restraining order against Sam. She returned to their apartment and tried to rid herself of this violent and controlling partner. Sam was not so easily dismissed. He broke the restraining order several times, coming to her door, screaming and yelling. "I was terrified to know that there was this huge man on the other side of the door who was so angry that you thought he was going to kill you." Michelle was forced to call the police.

As Michelle continues with her story I am aware of the harsh light in this overheated office. My lips purse as I listen to her memories and I look for the buried language that might say more than the obvious. Her voice sounds almost embarrassed and apologetic, and I try to nod in a way that belies censorship.

During this period, Michelle attended a support group for battered women. She remembers how the group helped her to handle the situation and she developed skills she now views as essential to survival.

> I was learning a little bit about the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness and I was trying to become more assertive. So I started just hanging up the phone and stuff like that every time I

> heard his voice. Just telling him I was not going to partake in this conversation and to get a lawyer.
>
> I decided I was going to make some major life style changes for myself – be more independent, more assertive, you know, all these things I had never thought out.

Eventually, Michelle won custody of her daughter. Sam was awarded visitation rights but his visits were sporadic and they have since ceased altogether. I asked Michelle, what contributed to her ability to remain out of the abusive relationship?

Michelle: I didn't stay in it because I had the opportunity to learn lots.

Kathy: And what was that opportunity?

Michelle: The opportunity was the safe place. They found it really important to run a group every night and to teach women about self-esteem, the cycle of abuse, ummm . . . assertiveness training. Like they really did educate you, not just help you through this situation. They really wanted to empower you. And . . . that education there helped me learn a lot. And that facilitated my ability to remove myself and to envision myself in a career. I knew somewhere in my mind that this was not the way it [a relationship] had to be. They provided me with the opportunity to leave to a safe place. I felt that for the first time I had an alternative.

Kathy: And then what happened – with the new life and the new learning?

Michelle: What I understand is . . . I mean, you are going to learn skills to become more independent and you learn more about yourself and how you landed up in these situations. And money is important. The program was free . . . money was definitely a factor. I had no money the night I left. So it would have been a serious factor.

Michelle has since divorced Sam and remarried. She is working towards a Bachelor of Arts degree and is thrilled to have the opportunity to continue learning. Michelle has learned to burrow into her own story and learn about herself and what held her in an abusive relationship. She has transcended her own

past experiences and is learning how her voice is connected to other voices. She particularly enjoys a women's studies class that she believes broadens her understanding of her own story.

> We did a section on women's need for a female goddess or something spiritual that is female – some figure that is powerful. And it really struck me and I enjoyed it and I thought, "There's a lot of truth in this." It's very important to me to learn about women's rights and our history and how we've ended up in this role and stuff like that. I learned enough coming out of the safe place and a lot on my own. I read a lot about abuse and now I'm learning a lot about women in general.

As Michelle reveals her sense of her own learning I am struck by the rhythm of her voice. Its cadence, a little uneven, still seems to have an ease that demands attention. She seems to want to take charge, to shape and direct her life. I wonder if this is a kind of separate knowing that Belenky and her associates (1986) identified – the precursor to connected knowing?

Michelle tosses her head when she speaks of assertiveness and power, as if by using the words she can assume their attributes. She leans forward to tell me about this "spiritual thing," as if to emphasize its relevance to her story. I feel a part of her wanting to move forward. Her language is '90's language, terms like "empowerment" and "female goddesses," and I am aware of my consciousness of this. In a sense I am mindful of my own knowing and how it must influence my interpretation of her words. Michelle's voice guides me back into her story.

The conversation takes on a new tone – definitive and direct. Michelle talks about her decision to leave and connects it to the media. She believes her

reluctance to accept the fact she was abused is related to the extremes of abuse that are reported or portrayed by the media – television in particular.

> The only violence or abuse you see is when you see the extremes like *The Burning Bed* or the *Oprah Winfrey Show* where these women have been tortured with knives and axes. I mean, we have so much minor-scale abuse that goes on that we don't understand as being violent because it is not shown as being violent. It is just too ordinary. When we portray it we have to sensationalize it to such an extent. I think it really has to do with media perception because they do not consider any of that stuff as being terribly abusive.
>
> When I was in the safe place the first time, I said to them, "I'm not like those women on the *Oprah Show*." And I think a lot of women really get a lot of information about themselves through the media. And the message about abuse is that it is not really abuse until a weapon is in evidence.

According to Michelle, the media message supports the societal theme that women are, at least in part, responsible for their abuse. Cliches like "you made your own bed now lie in it," support the notion women must accept the blame for their abuse.

> You keep it to yourself and you got yourself into this situation. I'm not exactly sure where I picked up this message but I did feel that it was my responsibility to hold a family together, so that is why I stayed. Because if this falls apart, it's my fault. It was my responsibility to hold it together and I didn't do a good enough job. I believe television promoted those notions.

Michelle speaks with a special edge to her voice and I pay particular attention. The '50s were my formative years, the years when television infiltrated and became central to many North American homes. Images of <u>*Father Knows Best*</u> *and* <u>*Leave It to Beaver*</u> *race through my mind. I entered the television world at my most formative stage and feel connected to Michelle's comments about its influence. I listen to the voice in my head that reminds me of how my '50s-celluloid world differed from*

Michelle's world of Winfrey. My memories, selective at best and blurred at the worst, nonetheless influence me. Like Michelle, I see how the media world has shaped my sense of myself as a person and as a woman. The reverberations of its influence are not minor. Perhaps this is solipsistic.

Michelle's inflection becomes more forceful as she shares with me her notions about her formalized or institutionalized learning. She uses words like "liberating" and "powerful" and her voice is rhythmic.

> It [university education] provides me with role models that give me a mentorship kind of thing. It's providing role models for an independent life – a life I would like to have. I think it's women and how they interact with one another. I don't think we are always the nicest to one another. I think we are often very competitive with one another.
>
> And school provides you with something to talk about that is mutual and you don't get into those things where you cut each other down. Meeting people at school and women professors who have done well academically, I really enjoy taking classes from and learn from. It's important for me to see women and how they have gotten to where they are now. You know, you pick up bits and pieces of this. I try to model myself after some of that.

When Michelle articulates her understanding of learning she uses words like "change" and "incorporation." She says, "I understand learning as something that I incorporate into myself and maybe changes the way I act or think." She mentions her volunteer work at an agency for battered women and feels that this advocacy demonstrates the learning she has absorbed into her life. "I will become more politically active in advocating for women's rights."

The even rhythm of Michelle's voice is interrupted by the click of the tape recorder as we come to the end of this session. I am startled the time has passed so

quickly. We both stretch and comment on the dim, musty room. We look at each other more directly than we did when we began and we smile a little less tentatively.

Lynn

> A secret shared with several persons is as beneficial as a merely private secret is destructive. (Carl Jung cited in Bauer, 1982)
>
> The sun! The sun! And all we can become!
> And the time ripe for running to the moon!
> In the long fields, I leave my father's eye;
> And shake the secrets from my deepest bones;
> My spirit rises with the rising wind. (Roethke, 1958)

Thirty-two year old Lynn knows how to keep a secret. More correctly, she knows how to pretend there is no secret. Since she was 18, she has pretended her family life is solid, secure and straightforward. She has maintained a solidarity with other family members in their conspiracy of silence. Her father lived a double life for 12 years, alternating between two women – Lynn's mother and a family friend. Lynn and her mother knew this was happening but never spoke of it. "Everything is hush-hush in my parent's house. When I turned 18, my dad got . . . ah . . . a . . . had a girlfriend who was my mom's friend. I was an in-between until the very end. The day he died in the hospital, I had the girlfriend in the hallway waiting to see him. I had my mother holding his hand and I was still in-between," she murmurs.

For Lynn, who has battled depression and suicidal tendencies for 15 years, the need to tell her story is not only important, but crucial. "I don't want to hide any more. I want to be normal. I want to, you know, make myself healthy so I can carry on with what I want to do. I don't want to hide from my story." She begins

our conversation with her family story. She speaks with candour, texture and depth, painting a picture she feels contributed to her involvement in two abusive relationships.

I flashback to the first time I met Lynn in a roomful of women on the east side of our city. The space is crammed with chairs and as more and more women arrive, more seats are added, and the attempt to maintain a circle is thwarted. The air is punctuated with squeals and cries from young voices, as children are coaxed into the child-care room down the hall. One woman breast feeds her small baby. Another reapplies her lipstick, checking its alignment in a tiny mirror she has drawn from her clutch bag. Another, nervously twists a large diamond ring on her left hand, and reaches for a handful of popcorn that sits in the middle of this lopsided circle. I scan the room for familiar faces. This is my second time at this self-help group and I already feel allegiance to the members I met the previous week.

As we settle into the mechanics of the meeting (announcements about upcoming advocacy meetings, petitions for letters of protest to the provincial government about social service cuts, requests from those in crisis to speak first), I notice the vibrancy in the room. There is routine here, people seem to have a sense of organization and I find this reassuring.

The woman I recognize as last week's "leader," a social worker she told us, starts the meeting by asking if someone in the room could go over the ground rules for the session. Lynn speaks up and clearly articulates the process the group has followed since its inception, about four years earlier. Her voice has clarity and self-assurance as she reminds us of the importance of unconditional acceptance and non-

judgemental responses. She knows her stuff. I think to myself, here's a woman who has got more than a few things figured out.

It is within the triangle of family relationships that Lynn situates her story. She met Don just after her father began his second relationship with her mother's friend. In order to cope with the deceit within her family, 18-year-old Lynn began to rebel. Don, seven years her senior, seemed an attractive alternative to life at home.

She moved out of her parents' home and in with Don. One month later she found herself pregnant and tried to hide the fact from her family. "I basically hid the pregnancy for as long as I could from my mom and dad. You know, the hiding tactic." Her husband was a hard-drinking guy, who spent much of his time in front of the television, ignoring Lynn. "So that was abusive in its own way. We did have physically-abusive fights many times. Ummm . . . I tend to block those out because the second marriage was 10 times worse."

Lynn left Don, and she and her son, Cameron, moved in with her parents. It was not an arrangement Lynn enjoyed, and she looked for alternatives. She felt panicky about being alone and remembers she "fell into a real trap in looking for a man." Not long after returning to her parent's home, Lynn met Stan, "a real Prince Charming." The relationship developed quickly and Lynn remembers feeling sorry for Stan because he claimed to have been the victim in his previously failed relationships. Stan blamed his former partners for his troubles and Lynn fell into the trap of smothering him with kindness.

> The caregiver in me just couldn't hold back. I saw it in my mom and dad when I was young. My baba and gido on my mom's side, the Ukrainian grandparents, were the total caregivers. The woman helped, even wiped the crumbs off the fellow's face for God's sake. I mean, that is what I grew up with and I just couldn't help but not care for him. So in the relationship there were some red flags that went up that I should have caught. There's nothing I can do about it now but be aware of them in the future.

Red flags or not, Lynn decided to move in with Stan. The prince quickly became a tyrant. Demanding and inflexible, Stan overreacted to everyday incidents. When Lynn accidentally broke his stereo, Stan went into a rage and tore the house apart. When he bought a new car, he told Lynn she was not good enough to drive such a precious vehicle. The couple went on vacation to the mountains and Stan instructed Lynn to ask a park information officer for directions. They ended up on a freshly-oiled road and Stan was incensed. He blamed Lynn and literally removed her from the car. "He basically just kicked me out of the car. I was five miles from anywhere and it was hot. It was July and I was one month pregnant. And he just shoved me out of the car saying that it was my fault that we hit the oiled surface."

As the relationship continued, the violence escalated. Stan abused alcohol and drugs, which seemed to fuel his aggressive behaviour. Lynn remembers one night when her new daughter was only two weeks old. The family was at the dinner table and Stan accused Cameron of taking too large a serving from the casserole dish. Stan flung the casserole across the floor, and punctuated his actions by throwing a large container of milk that saturated Lynn and the newborn. Not satisfied, Stan pushed Lynn down and forced her to clean up the

milk. She attempted to phone the police, but Stan wrenched the phone from her hands and smashed it on the floor.

> I can give more instances . . . but definitely . . . the sexual abuse was there. Um . . . degrading and demanding, even when I was pregnant. Um . . . a lot of financial abuse. He would question and begrudge every penny I spent. My son and I would buy a pop and a donut at the mall and I would never hear the end of it.

Cameron witnessed these harsh actions and reacted with fear. Lynn would find her son crouched in his closet, gripping a knife. "He would just sit there and wait for Stan." Lynn believes Stan's threatening behaviour toward the children was a major impetus for her to leave.

> It was for the safety of the children. I think that I knew then that I had to leave. So the decision to leave was a slow process. Because I really feel that women don't trust their own instincts. You're told that this is all your fault. You're told that you're nothing. You're told that no one would want you. You've got two kids by two different men who don't want you. You can't work. You only work in a stupid store. These are the messages.
>
> Even the system. I mean the system of going on welfare is so degrading.

For Lynn, the instinct to protect her children and her instincts as a caregiver, were important factors in her decision to leave. The caregiving role that held her in the relationship was ironically to provide motivation to leave.

There was more than one factor influencing Lynn's decision to leave. Lynn recalls the impact of a friendship she had with another woman. Her friend could see the damage the marriage was inflicting on Cameron and Lynn. This woman often asked Lynn why she put up with such a relationship. Finally, her friend angrily confronted Lynn and suggested the abuse was having profound affects on

Cameron. Lynn recalls this friend's support, and the backing she received from another female friend, as significant in her decision to leave.

Lynn speaks of other determinants in her decision to remove herself from the abusive relationship. She credits a social worker with putting her in touch with a battered women's support group that helped her recognize the need to remove herself from the abusive relationship. The group was vital to her ability to understand her own experience and learn from it.

Kathy: So the support group was important in providing you with an understanding of the abuse?

Lynn: Definitely. I never even knew how to talk about assertiveness five years ago. My whole language of self-awareness, of self-help has really come out of the three phases of that program.

She explains the three phases of the program. Each phase is 12 weeks long. The first focuses on emotional support and provides group members with information about support services and the myths of spousal abuse. The second explores psychological and relationship issues and the participants consider possibilities that could help them rebuild their lives. The third is the advocacy phase, or the phase where the participants try to think of ways to educate the public about abuse.

In addition to this program, Lynn attends a self-help support group for abused women and is involved in a provincial government program designed to help women find options to welfare. Both these organizations have helped in her resolve to remain out of an abusive relationship. She believes she has learned

from other women in these groups who shared their stories and shared themselves.

Lynn: I learned that there is no one way to see the world–that there's lots of things that can happen. My experience is valid for me and is just as good as anyone else's. I am really thankful for all those agencies that are put there. I mean, I don't know where we would be without those agencies.

Kathy: Those have been a positive thing for you?

Lynn: Yes. Having their kind of strength coming out of these three programs–which is a lot of advocacy–telling your story, even similar to what we are doing today . . . talking into a recorder. We did that. Um . . . speaking out and saying this is my story. This is what happened to me.

Even in my church I've really spoken out. I'm just shaking the church bricks to nothing. I really want to advocate for women's issues, on abuse, because they are so important.

Kathy: So you are in church using the opportunity to let people know what has happened to you?

Lynn: Definitely. Now they understand. So the whole awareness of why abused women stay, why . . . what makes them leave. I mean it's all part of society's education. Of letting them know that this is happening.

Lynn reveals she believes that the world, society, and the community supported her staying in her abusive relationship. She feels she should have left when she was pregnant but society's message is that you need a man with you when you're pregnant. "I mean, the only way you probably had no husband in bed beside you when you are pregnant was if he had died or something. I mean, it was an old wives' tale–society's attitude." She feels the school's opinion was that her son's problems were a result of home problems. The stereotype of a single mother bringing up delinquent children haunted her.

Economics played a part in why Lynn stayed in abusive relationships. She felt trapped in the relationship because her financial options were limited – limited to welfare. Although the monetary situation in her relationship was far from perfect, Lynn had more disposable income living with Stan. "As a woman on welfare, where are you supposed to turn? I mean the day you leave, are you supposed to just go and work as a dentist? At least with these men I had food on the table."

Patterns. The word flashes across my mind as Lynn voices her narrative. Through the labyrinth of accounts I am writing, I think I see a symmetry. Snippets of this and that – blame, confining roles, economic binds, school systems, legal institutions. I see this woman before me willing to share her life, not just as a means of personal therapy but as a way to change the lives of other women. She has trusted me with her story and I feel flattered, even honoured. I am reminded of the words from a novel I am reading. "The narrative maze opens and permits her to walk through." (Shields, 1993, p. 190) Her narrative enables us both to walk through.

As I draft these stories I wonder about their different story lines. Mingled with the common elements are the unique voices of each woman, and I try to remind myself not to be seduced by the simple, easy, or obvious connections. I want to see the stories vividly, in colour so to speak, so their complexities are exposed and the substantial, not arbitrary, connections can be discovered. It is the "researcher's agenda" and I realize it permeates our conversation.

Lynn's story is the story of hope. Through learning, she finds the power to hope. She and her children continue to live on their own, on social assistance, but

she is completing the program that helps women find alternatives to welfare. Currently, she is finishing academic upgrading in the hope of creating better career opportunities. She and her son are receiving counselling as one means of coping with the aftermath of abuse. She maintains her membership in the self-help group for battered women and sees hope through this process. She wants to advocate for abused women and is reaching out towards other women to gain and give support. Support is the cornerstone of her learning which moves toward hope. "With the help of a lot of people, I feel like I just might get somewhere, I hope."

From Silence to Voice

This is a chapter of voices that, taken together, offer us glimpses of the experiences of some abused women. Their stories, public now, represent a move from silence toward voice. The stories set the scene for the fifth chapter which searches for themes that connect each individual story to other stories.

CHAPTER 5

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE CONNECTING STORY

Family Stories

I was 12 when I first decided to take on "the system." It was a wintry evening like any other in Winnipeg – temperatures well below what any human being could withstand and still maintain some semblance of sanity. A sea of snow covered our yard and my two brothers were arguing over whose turn it was to shovel our walkway, punctuating their points with a few not so well placed jabs to each other's shoulder. Rough housing is what my dad called it. I was smug in the confidence that the debate about shovelling would exclude me, because in my family my gender kept me out of contention for completing such a chore. No, I believe I had just finished the supper dishes (melmac plates that came in the jumbo size boxes of Cheer detergent) and was layering myself in ski pants, sweaters and two pair of mismatched socks covered with little fuzz balls and a "fun fur" hat that I got on sale at the Bay downtown. I was on my way to the local branch of the library, a six-block walk if you're given to counting.

I was heading to pick up something to read to fill those restless moments when my father took to hogging the television so he could hum along with Charlie Chamberlain on Don Messer's Jubilee. We only had one TV, which was pretty much par for the course at the time, and it stood at the head of the living room like some revered idol. So all in all, it was a pretty routine night in a reasonably conventional family. Not the kind of night that you could have predicted would initiate me into the world of social action.

Reading was a fundamental part of my life. I particularly enjoyed novels, cutting my teeth as it were on Ann of Green Gables and Girl of the Limberlost. The library was the main source of my material. I enjoyed my trips there because the building was usually filled with kids my age, ostensibly there to look stuff up in the junior Britannica in order to complete homework assignments. This January night was no different and I remember being in a jovial mood despite the nasty weather.

I spent about half an hour perusing the young reader section of the library – a category that included readers 10-13 years. Not finding anything to my liking, I ventured into the teenage section and found several books that piqued my attention. I settled on one called Hawaii, by James Michener. The jacket summary promised me an opportunity to experience the life story of Malama, a woman who survived hardship, heartbreak and other serious tribulations on the beautiful Pacific Island. I plucked the book from the shelf and headed toward the circulation desk.

It was there I encountered Mrs. Blackmore, the assistant librarian, a woman short in stature and long on regulations and procedures. She accepted the book from me with something approximating disdain and moved to withdraw the card from where it was tucked inside its pocket. Here's where the trouble began, but not where it ended.

Unbeknownst to me, the book was classified OTR (Older Teenage Reader), and one look at my outfit alone clued Mrs. Blackmore into the fact that I was a far cry from the 17 to 18-year-old that I would have to be in order to "legally" withdraw the book. When she asked me my age (probably the required procedure outlined in the librarian assistant's handbook), it crossed my mind that it could be a question

crucial to my obtaining the novel. I raised my head and shoulders in a puffed-up kind of way that I thought added maturity and I said in a not-so-loud voice, "13 last month." Whether she believed me or not was irrelevant, because I needed was to be 17. She denied me the publication.

No amount of negotiation could induce Mrs. Blackmore to lend me this novel. I returned home empty handed and indignant.

As I walked up the still uncleared driveway, I noticed a 1959 Ford Fairlane was not so expertly parked behind my dad's 1958 two-tone blue model. This meant that either my Uncle John, my Aunt Bea, or both, were visiting. I liked my uncle, but was a little afraid of my aunt, the mother of eight of my first cousins. Auntie Bea didn't go in much for dressing up and I remember my dad saying that she wouldn't be all that bad looking if "she just spruced herself up some." Both my parents were given to commenting that she should spend less time running around to political meetings (she was secretary for the federal Liberal constituency in our area) and more time taking care of her family. I did notice that Auntie Bea never seemed phased by their thinly veiled disapproval.

I came in through the side entrance, the one we called the back door, to find my mother and my aunt ensconced at our brown and gold arborite kitchen table. It didn't take me but a minute to blurt out my angry reaction to the injustice of the library incident. I'm not sure that I expected much of a response from these two, after all, what interest would they have in a 12-year-old's grievance? But to my amazement they seemed more than concerned. They too shared my exasperation.

I joined them at the table and, over tea and bread grilled with cheese, we commiserated about what to do. My mom wanted to phone the library on my behalf and explain that I was a mostly sensible, grade eight student. After all, she and my dad were scrimping and saving to send me to an all girls' private school, so that I would be the product of a superior education system. To my mom's way of thinking, that gave me a definite edge. She said that she would tell them, I had her permission to read the book and that should be the end of it. This idea appealed to me. I saw it as expedient, and it required no more effort on my part.

Aunt Bea had another idea. Why didn't I write to city council and voice my complaint about the discrimination? She pointed out that the library's policy not only discriminated against young readers but it was a form of censorship which she personally found reprehensible. I thought "reprehensible" was a pretty nifty word, so I stored it away for future use. She felt the procedure would never change if the people in charge were not aware there was a problem. My mother thought that I might first alert the "head guy" of the library, but Aunt Bea was convinced that I should bypass the "bureaucrats" (another great word), and work with the politicians. She explained there was a greater likelihood my concern would be addressed if I sought the help of the politicians because they mostly liked to help their constituents. Besides, my Uncle John was an alderman and would ensure that my letter received some attention.

Well, to say that I got caught up in the fever of the moment is to say that William F. Buckley is somewhat conservative. I composed what was to me, and as it turns out, was to the head librarian, a scathing letter condemning the library procedures and the library's general attitude toward "younger" readers. My uncle

reported that the letter was read aloud at the council meeting and it was tabled for further study. I thought that having my letter presented at council was tantamount to having a published novel, and for the next three days basked in the glory of triumph.

High on the sweet taste of victory, I made my way back to the library, fully convinced that I could withdraw the novel in question. I gingerly entered the dreaded teenage section and found the publication. Feeling powerful and self-assured I marched to the circulation desk and presented the book with my library card. I recognized the head librarian, Mrs. Cantor, and offered her an amiable smile. What I got in return was a scowl and a very stiff, very loud and very public reprimand.

I guess Mrs. Cantor missed the positive spirit in which my protest was offered. Instead of seeing the letter as constructive criticism of the system, she took my complaint extremely personally. She was more than prepared to defend not only her position, but also to make it unlikely that I would ever again consider stepping foot into "her" library. Her thunderous reproach left me shaking in my mukluks and reassessing the virtues of political protest.

I tell this story to create a beginning, a framework from which to relate my story of hearing Diane's, Kate's, Michelle's and Lynn's voices. I tell it as a way of making sense of their stories. It is the opening chapter of the connecting story, a narrative that centres on voice. The connecting story is an interpretive narrative that attempts to listen to the voices of the four participants and filters their voices through my own voice. The story is not a fixed and final account "since every voice is different and every relationship is by definition, a fluid, ever changing, and unique experience" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 22). It is as much a tale of

differences as it is a story of similarities, for women are not a homogeneous group who arrange themselves in orderly categories. It is a story that attempts to synthesize the participants' stories with other writings about knowledge and transformations. It is a layered story that tells of a changing voice, the voice that moves from silence to resonance, a voice that awakens to new possibilities.

My story has three voices. The first, my personal voice, speaks of making connections between my life story and the narratives of the four participants. It searches for themes or patterns across our personal stories. Second, my academic voice shapes my narrative around and within notions of learning and knowledge. It seeks to understand how all our stories are interwoven and attempts to interpret them in terms of learning and knowing. The third voice reviews interconnections between the personal and the pedagogical. The three voices create my story. Sometimes they are separate and sometimes they are blended. Together they form a connective story – the "researcher's" story.

Because all the participants in this study are women, I turned to the literature that concerns itself with women to provide the "theoretical" part of the connecting story. In particular, I have drawn from the works of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), Gilligan (1982), Chanfrault-Duchet (1991), Faludi (1991), Brown and Gilligan (1992), Steinem (1993) and Wolfe (1993). These theorists allay themselves with feminist ideologies, but do not necessarily make the same assumptions about women, their development, their ways of learning and knowing or their potential for power. I present the connecting story as an eclectic

synthesis – a weaving of many threads of argument in order to reach an understanding of Diane's, Kate's, Michelle's and Lynn's stories.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) consider the place of the researcher's voice in narrative writing. "We have dealt with issues of author/researcher's voice as an issue of multiple "I's" drawing attention to who speaks as the researcher, teacher, man or woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic and as theory builder" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 10). I am using my story to make meaning of the experience of the four story tellers. This connecting story is not told in a singular voice but in a multiplicity of voices that in concert help to present the "researcher's" story. The connecting story interprets and recreates the participants' experience within my own experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

What kind of learning or knowing was at work in my library story? Did the event awaken me to anything important or did the storytelling itself focus and shape some learning? Does my childhood sketch bear any resemblance to the family stories that Diane, Kate, Michelle and Lynn shared with me and, if so, are there any common understandings that illustrate learning and knowing? What pieces of my family story have had an impact on my hearing and understanding of the stories of these four participants? Do any, or all, of my three voices relate to the participants' family stories, their plots and sub-plots? What, if any, is the dominant discourse in our family stories and how does it interact with learning and knowing?

On the surface there are parallels between the plots of my personal family story and those of the four study participants. The "work" roles within my family

were often gender specific. The boys completed the more physically demanding tasks and the girls were responsible for the household duties. My father's desires superseded those of the other family members, including my mother's. Television was a primary means of entertainment and information dispersal in our family.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), family stories are "stories handed down across generations about family members and family events" (p. 13). My library story conforms to this definition because it is one that my family likes to tell (although the versions vary somewhat with the storyteller) and it has been told to my children and their cousins. My story and the stories of the four participants reflect society's conventions about what constitutes a family, the roles of the family members, and the extent to which the stories shape our identities. They are teaching stories.

> The family's first concern is itself, but its second realm of concern is its relation to the world. Family stories about the world are usually teaching stories, telling members still at home the ways of the world according to the experiences its elders have had . . . Family stories seem to persist in importance even when people think of themselves individually, without regard to their familiar roles. The particular human chain we are part of is central to our individual identity. (Stone, 1988, p. 7)

The participants' family stories inform us about the learning or knowing that contributed to their remaining in abusive relationships. All four participants begin the story of their abuse with a family story. Three of the four mention their father before they mention their mother. Diane portrays her father as a strict but fair head of the household who was the primary decision maker in her family. Her mother performed the caretaker role and Diane felt she learned, "you got

married, you have children, you stay at home and then you go out to work or look for something in your life that ensures the needs of the family are met." Similarly, Kate initiates her family story with a description of her father and his relationship with her mother. "There was a lot of warfare in my family. That's how he [her father] saw relationships." Michelle recalls that her mother emphasized that it was her daughters' duty to care for their father. Directions like "go kiss him" and "clean up after him" told Michelle "every father needs a girl and therefore, every husband needs a . . . ." Lynn learned that silence and secrets were codes to live by and that it was OK for a man to share two women as long as it wasn't talked about.

The research conducted by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) forms part of my connecting story. Their work, as I outlined in the literature review, expresses women's development using the metaphor of voice and considers five categories of women's knowing: received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. They define these ways of knowing in this way:

> *silence*, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; *received knowledge*, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own; *procedural knowledge*, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and *constructed knowledge*, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. (p. 15)

Belenky and her colleagues (1986) look to "family life and the politics of talk" (p. 155) as important to development, and believe families "accurately reflect the environments that give rise to each of these ways of knowing" (p. 156).

The family stories of the participants in this research seem to support the contention that the family nurtures our ways of knowing. The voices in the family stories echo with references to how words were central to learning experienced within the family. The cues received from parents formed the basis for understanding of relationships and the distribution of power within those relationships. Take a look at these statements:

Michelle: Dad's opinion was always very important and even set the rules within the family. And Dad's opinion was the important one and we always had to go get it. At the time I just accepted it as true.

Kate: And . . . if you did something, my dad said you were stupid. And he just shouted. And I was used to hearing it and probably believed it to some degree because I heard it a lot.

Lynn: Everything was hush-hush in our house. If you didn't talk about anything – especially where my dad's actions were concerned – then it didn't exist.

These women received messages and report that they accepted them as truths. For them, the voices of authority within the family were fixed, and the messages they received were bound up in dichotomized thinking – there was an accepted and a condemned way to behave and little room to negotiate. They were living as received knowers.

For Lynn, Kate, Michelle and Diane, the early years within their families represented an imbalance of power. For most of them, the inequality was considered permanent. Kate is an exception. She characterized her father as

aggressive and used the analogy of warfare in describing family interactions. Therefore, it might be concluded that she would not have developed her own voice or the ability to construct her own reality. But Kate loved books. Reading was predominant in her life and may account for her eventual ability to see she had more control in her family than her parents were willing to concede. Like some of the women in the study conducted by Belenky and her associates (1986), Kate "learned to immerse herself in at least one symbol system from an early age" (p. 162). Kate found images, messages and knowledge within her reading that shifted her away from being only the receiver of her family's knowledge, thus helping her move beyond the "epistemological atmosphere" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 162) created by her family story. Kate says,"Even though I was told that I was stupid, I had read enough to know that I had some good ideas. I had a feeling that I was smart but fluctuated between belief and disbelief."

My library story highlights the important place that reading held in my formative years. Like Kate, I took refuge in books and this could account for some of my ability to create a diverse symbolism in my everyday world. For both Kate and me, literature helped to construct our reality and facilitated a move toward procedural knowing.

Both Diane's and my family stories demonstrate elements of received knowledge and exemplify other forms of knowing. Both of us understood our father to hold the power within the family–he was the decision maker. However, Diane recalls that if she disagreed with her father "you could always talk with

him." This implies that Diane had the opportunity to, if not create her own truth, at least attempt to present another perspective. Whereas this may not illustrate subjective knowledge per se, it represents a possible space for subjective knowing in a child's life. My family story reveals the elements of subjective knowledge and I was encouraged to voice my "truth" about what I felt was a discriminatory practise. I received information from my aunt (note the eagerness for words that I felt were powerful), but was given the opportunity to review my opinions and make my own decision. The politics of talk in my family did not include the notion that children should be seen and not heard. That is not to say there were never times that I was silenced, but there were often chances for me to collaborate with other family members. The conversation between my aunt, my mother and myself with voicing my concern about library practises illustrates "building, block by block, on one another's ideas" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 157).

Belenky and her colleagues (1986) found that in "the stories the received knowers told, there were no images of rebellion against adult authority" (p. 166). Although all four of the women who shared their stories with me identified rebellious behaviour against their families, the rebellion was generally played out through establishing sexual relationships with males outside the family. For all but one, their soon-to-be spouses facilitated the rebellion. Lynn's words summarize the experience of Diane and Kate. "I met my husband when I was 18. He was 25. I was living at home. Coming home late. Rebelling. Decided to leave. And . . . umm . . . was pregnant a month later." For the fourth participant, Michelle,

rebellion started in the very early teenage years. "I rebelled sexually. I let them [boys she met] do all these things to me. And . . . I didn't see myself as being used or exploited or any of those things." Although the women use the word "rebellion" to characterize their actions, it seems that simply moved from embracing the authority of the father to accepting the authority of their spouses.

Belenky and her collaborators (1986), maintain that lack of rebellion represents voicelessness. Do the experiences of the women in this study support this contention? All the women report that they rebelled against their families. To some degree, their rebellious behaviour seemed only to transfer their lack of voice from one situation (the family) to another (their male relationships). This could be interpreted as a tendency to "allocate speaking to men and listening to women" (p. 167). However, the rebellious behaviour does demonstrate attempts to challenge their family stories, and therefore can be seen as an endeavour to move from silence towards voice.

Walker (1979) applies the concept of learned helplessness to battered women. She believes that this helplessness occurs when battered women learn to feel that no matter what they do it seems impossible to effect change in their lives. The women in this study talked about how their families helped to cultivate in them, a sense of learned helplessness. Lynn, for example, felt compelled to keep her father's extra-marital relationship secret and could not voice her displeasure. It would seem that this form of voicelessness fosters the notion of women as victims and Belenky and her associates contend that this "may account for the greater prevalence of clinical depression and learned helplessness among

women than among men" (p. 167). The family stories of the participants in this study reveal themes of helplessness, hopelessness and powerlessness and to that extent they verify the claim of Belenky and her colleagues.

The notion of helplessness is also illustrated in Karen J. Deby's (1993) study. She reviewed common experiential themes expressed by abused women about their abusive relationships. She found the themes fell within concept groups and that helplessness was one of the more frequently expressed themes, receiving a third-place ranking. Deby classified this theme under the concept of powerless/needy. My co-researchers in this narrative study represent their relationships with their fathers as power relationships depicting their fathers as the most dominant members of the family. Their stories reveal their fathers were at the best, distant but benevolent (Diane, Kathy, Michelle) and, at the worst, disinterested and denigrating (Kate and Lynn). Diane stated "my father ruled the roost" and Kate reported that her father wielded his power through "verbal assaults." The concept of powerless/needy seems rooted in these family stories fuelling self-images of helplessness.

My library story represents my family story and it shares some common elements with the family stories of the participants. Although I tell the story with a degree of lightheartedness, it nonetheless stands as a metaphor for both the supportive and critical aspects of growing up in my family. My family story, like the family stories of the four participants in this study, reflects some of society's story, but I will deal with that story separately. Like Diane, Kate, Michelle and Lynn, I perceived my father as the most powerful member of our family. His

wishes usually overrode the desires of other family members, including my mother's. I learned that pleasing my father was an important element of survival in the family. As voiced in their family stories, the four participants echo a similar theme. All of us learned that pleasing the most powerful member of the family was crucial.

These family stories inform us of the early learning that takes place in our lives. They are stories that shape self-identity (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) and cultivate or silence voice (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Although my story included the theme of pleasing, I was not always cornered by it, nor did it continually leave me voiceless. I did express my displeasure with the powerful library system. Is there something in my family story that might suggest how I learned that pleasing those in power was not always vital? What could have nurtured the notion that sometimes we have the power to question authority? Belenky and her colleagues (1986) would explain this as an ability to respond to an inner voice that provides us with "the right to speak out-even against authority" (p. 169). This notion is developed, they maintain, with the support of the family. In my case this support was represented in the backing I received from my aunt and my mother. Although my father did not openly support my protest, he did not block it. In this story, I represent the subjective knower, the knower who is willing to sometimes forego the conventional feminine role that stresses "goodness" and responds to an inner voice that expresses less pleasing emotions like anger or rage.

Steinem (1992) speaks of families and how they can nurture notions of power and control. She uses her personal experience, her family story, to identify the process by which she learned that power lay anywhere but within herself. "I had been raised to assume all power was outside myself" (p. 22). She tells a personal story that highlights how she learned that she had power within herself. The story takes place when Steinem was well into her thirties. She tells about being refused entrance into a hotel because she was unescorted. Her first reaction was to blame herself for not looking right (she guessed that maybe she looked like a prostitute), and she remembers feeling humiliated and ashamed. She had occasion to return to the hotel some days later and received the same treatment. This time she challenged the manager, who had previously denied her access to the hotel. She stood her ground and gained entrance. What was different this time, she asked herself? Self-esteem was her answer.

Steinem explains how her self-esteem was increased. An event took place between her first and second visit to the hotel. A woman doctor had attempted to take a group of friends for lunch at a public restaurant. It was called the Oak Room and at lunch time it was reserved for men only. According to the restaurant management, women's voices disturbed the ability of men to conduct business. When the female doctor and her friends tried to gain entrance to the restaurant, they were refused. The women left angry and their anger moved them toward action. They organized a rally to protest the restaurant's discriminatory practises. Steinem joined the protest march and found the powerful spirit of the picket line contagious. By "contagion" she gained the self-esteem and confidence necessary to

stand up to the hotel manager who had confronted her earlier. "When I faced the hotel manager again, I had glimpsed the world as if women mattered. By seeing through their eyes, I had begun to see through my own" (p. 25).

Low self-esteem seems to be an accepted characteristic of battered women (Hilberman & Munson, 1977-78; Walker, 1979; Bowen, 1982; Maertz, 1990). Like Steinem's, the family stories of the women in this research are peppered with comments that they lacked self-confidence and felt compelled to defer to the more powerful members of their family. Learned helplessness and the belief that as women they have no internal power is rooted in their family stories. My story has similar themes, but like Steinem, little by little, and through contagion (my aunt and mother in the library story) I learned that I had some internal power (a subjective sense of knowledge). Diane, Kate, Michelle and Lynn's family stories illustrate little "learning by contagion."

Family stories are fundamental experiences of life. The family stories of the co-researchers in this study establish a base for understanding how and why we make decisions. Each of us has married and has had children, creating new families with their own stories. These "new" stories are influenced by the "old" stories and they stand as testimony to the influence of early learning.

Society's Story

The individual family stories that we tell are often shaped by the script that has been developed within society. Family stories mould individual identity, but the "experience of family stories has existential and internal conditions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 13). Messages within popular culture direct our behaviour

and prescribe gender-based roles. Narratives can amplify the complexities of social conditioning and help women to analyze perceptions of their role and status in society. Chanfrault-Duchet (1991), speaks to the "social nature of the self-dramatized in the narrative" (p. 77). She maintains that women's stories capture the grand narratives of the society in which they dwell. Not only do they outline the social self within the social order, but they portray the "collective representations of women as they have been shaped by society" (p. 78).

Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) presents a system for analyzing narratives. She identifies "key phrases" which "define a type of relationship between the self and the social sphere, that is, the community (which contributed to the formation of the self), and, more broadly, the society as a whole" (p. 77). In addition, Chanfrault-Duchet searches for "key patterns" in the narrative. These represent "the reproduction or transgression of the hegemonic social model, that is the dominant model that finds its way into social groups beyond the specific social model available to each group" (pp. 77-78). "Key patterns" in the stories that Diane, Kate, Michelle and Lynn shared with me present a picture of how they understand society's story.

As part of this study, I asked the women participants if they felt society played a role in their stories. Each expressed cognizance of the dominant social values they felt were supported, directly and indirectly, within society.

Listen to Diane's words:

> Well, I think that it is society's responsibility [to help prevent abuse]. Little boys are raised to be different than little girls. Not only different in . . . umm . . . physically different – they have different

> attitudes. Boys can argue, be loud, be dirty. Girls have to sit with their knees together, with white gloves. This has been from day one.
>
> We have songs, *Someday My Prince Will Come*, which means a girl just sort of stands there and waits and one day he'll come along on his horse. And so you have this vision, like Cinderella, of being swept off your feet. So we've dreamed this dream. And it is the loss of this dream that we grieve – its like the North American Dream that is impossible to obtain.
>
> So I see the responsibility of society is to change – to change for the children. The children need to grow up with the idea that men and women are equal – intrinsically equal.

And Kate says:

> Our society, when I was coming out, definitely encouraged the separation of the man's world and the woman's world. And even women who were educated fell into that. And if you had a young family at home you were amiss if you were not there with cookies and milk at 3:00 when the children bounced in. I was obsessed with the idea of making everything shining and clean and perfect. I grasped at that myth, the myth of the perfect wife, the perfect family, because if I were perfect then everybody would be perfect.
>
> To some degree I still buy it. And that's it. The fertile ground of the power that this guy had over me. You know it wasn't just him, it was society too. It was everything you looked at, heard and felt.

Lynn and Michelle repeat these sentiments. For Michelle, "patriarchy is structured in our systems, in our religion, in our families." And if you remember, Lynn's story emphasized the notion that in our society it was frowned upon to leave a relationship when pregnant and she referred to how "church values" and the "old women in the church" insisted "you stay with your husband for better or worse."

These women's words share a common theme, a theme of passivity and no sense of self-identity. The participants express a collective belief that the family

and society share some responsibility for nurturing their lack of self-esteem. They make connections between their individual stories and society's story. Their words seem to reflect a move from "separate" knowing toward "connected" knowing (Gilligan, 1982). By organizing their observations of the family and society in this connected way, the four participants illustrate "procedural" knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986).

Faludi (1991) refers to the constraining nature of the media in portraying images of women. She points out that the screen and stage primarily portray women as silenced and controlled. An example she feels brings home the ultimate image of the silenced woman is the character of Laura from *Twin Peaks*. Laura was murdered in the series but was revered in the headlines of a popular magazine article as *Women We Love*. Two of the participants' stories alluded to other media messages that underpin the notion they were powerless and lacked voice. They mention the place that media played in supporting their belief they should remain in the abusive relationships. Kate's recollection of the ring-around-the-collar commercial voices her connection of media messages (societal) to her own development of self. Michelle remembers thinking that her situation never seemed as bad as the abusive situations presented in the news and on docu-dramas. It does not seem coincidental that one of the most violent encounters with her husband occurred while the two were watching an *Oprah Winfrey Show* that highlighted women who had cheated on their husbands. My own family story positioned the TV as a revered presence – an allegory for its place in shaping my notions of myself and my femaleness. It is interesting to note that Diane, in citing

the source of important learning that fostered her ability to remain removed from the abusive situation, mentions the significance of the movie that taught her about equality.

Society then, sent messages to all of us involved in this study, and in our early years, we often accepted them as received knowers. The messages fostered relationships that were "narrowed and distorted by gender stereotypes or used as opportunities for distancing, abuse, subordination, invalidation, or other forms of psychological violation, physical violence, and oppression" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 22). At some point, all of us expanded our horizons of knowing. A new learning was cultivated and we were awakened to fresh possibilities. Let us look at how and when this may have happened. Let us listen to the awakened voice.

Awakenings

The Development of the Awakened Voice

"The horizons of our knowing shift and change as we awaken to new ways of 'seeing' our world, to different ways of seeing ourselves in relation to each other and to the world" (Clandinin & Connelly, In press). How did the women in this study move from silence to voice? What did they learn or unlearn that presented them with the idea that they not only had a voice but their voice was powerful and resonant. What cultivated an understanding that they had new possibilities which had previously seemed impossible? Did the women undergo distinct and identifiable transformations or are the lines of movement (change) blurred and fuzzy?

The awakenings story does not fit neatly into a linear developmental tale. Like all good stories, its plot moves and twists with the characters. It is not a story of one clear-cut epiphany, but rather it is a slow and gradual unfolding of understanding relationships that defies neat packaging. The women negotiated their way through the rough waters of developing an awakened voice, moving back and forth between the horizons of their evolution. Here is a story in which notions of knowledge, learning, self-esteem and power are interwoven. It is a story that analyzes and synthesizes, but the analysis and synthesis are not confined to one theory that encompasses all of the story's complexities. It is a story pieced together from the literature and from life's experiences. It is a story that began with a vacillating voice that has become more resolute with the telling.

Voice is the centrepiece of the awakenings story. "We have emphasized thus far that quest for self and voice plays a central role in transformations in women's ways of knowing" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 133). The awakened voice is a chorus of voices that shapes transformations. It is a voice created by a variety of experiences that connect, separate and reconnect. That is, finding voice is a process that involves a multiplicity of experiences that work together to facilitate transformations and awakenings. I believe the awakenings of the women in this study bear this out.

All of the participants in this story are mothers. All of them identified their pregnancies as critical times in their relationships. The three women who reported physical abuse recall that the abuse escalated either with pregnancy or childbirth. Kate, who reported emotional but no physical abuse, states it was after the birth

of her last child that the verbal abuse worsened. For all but Kate, their children played a role in moving them to leave the abusive relationship. Their feelings for their children were part of what awakened them and moved them to transformation.

Diane, Michelle and Lynn report their children provided some of the motivation to leave the abusive situation. Diane's children experienced severe abuse, witness the "hot-dog" scene. Lynn says her son was so fearful of her second husband that he hid in his closet, shaking in terror. The fact that their children cultivated their awakenings seems to fit with Clandinin and Connelly's cultivation process. "Initially we saw this ongoing process as one of cultivation, a living and retelling of our stories. We also understand the process of cultivation as occurring when an individual, group of individuals, an institution or culture acts upon a person" (in press). The children played a part in the awakening story of these three women, helping to shape their stories and presenting new "horizons of knowing" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 4). I see this awakening piece as having characteristics of connected knowing, a part of procedural knowing that includes a capacity for empathy (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986).

A key theme common to the stories of the four participants in this study is the belief they were either crazy, stupid or both. While in the relationships, the women describe how their partners accuse them of stupidity and/or craziness and how they accepted this as "the truth." Two said they felt that perhaps they were crazy when they could not leave the abusive relationships. Each underwent a

gradual transformation that moved them to question this belief. Each began to see there is no "one" truth and that craziness may lie in the eyes of the beholder.

For Diane, Lynn and Michelle, the notion that they were not crazy was initially developed with the help of friends. Lynn recalls, "And this one friend, the foster mom, she has really helped me a lot because she has worked in the system. She has been a parent aid to women who have been in abusive relationships – women who had their children taken away from them. A lot of what she said made me aware." Diane's contact with a social worker was instrumental in helping her to shift her belief from considering herself crazy to considering her ex-husband as the unbalanced one. She says, "And this social worker has opened me up to all sorts of things." On the surface, it seems that this knowledge was received knowledge, since it came from an authority, the social worker. As Lynn puts it, she was glad of being "officially told at [names a social agency] about how you can look at things differently and say 'hey, maybe that's not the way it should be or the way it is from my experience.' I don't think I ever had the opportunity to look at something and give my opinion or be given a choice to do something." Although the knowledge was acquired as received knowledge (from the experts) it served as the initiator of constructed knowledge. Diane, clarifies the process. She refers to the social worker who co-founded a support group for abused women:

> She is a feminist and always tries to keep the power balanced among us. She presented us [the support group] with different theories and things. We would just talk about them. There was no right or wrong way. She encouraged modification of any ideas presented. And we just learned.

These words reflect an integration of voices. Diane moved outside the knowledge imparted to her by the expert (received knowledge) and began to integrate a recognition of her own influence and strength (subjective knowledge). The integration represents a move toward constructed knowledge. Belenky and her group report a similar movement by some participants in their research.

> They told us that their current way of knowing and viewing their world – a way of knowing we call constructed knowledge – began as an effort to reclaim the self by attempting to integrate knowledge they felt was personally important with the knowledge they had learned from others. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 134)

For Diane, the movement towards constructed knowledge represented a movement away from the view of herself as crazy. It exemplifies movement towards a new, more positive self-concept. It would seem then that constructivists demonstrate increased self-confidence and self-esteem that according to many (Hilberman & Munson, 1977-78; 1978; Walker, 1979; Bowen, 1982; Hartik, 1982; Kordyban, 1987) is pre-requisite to remaining out of abusive relationships.

Brown and Gilligan argue that,

> resonant relationships between girls and women are crucial for girls' development, for women's psychological health, and also for bringing women's voices fully into the world so that the social construction of reality – the construction of the human world that is institutionalized by society and carried across generations by culture – will be built by and acoustically resonant for both men and women. (1992, p. 7)

Similarly, the co-researchers in this study indicate that the support of other women was crucial to their ability to remain out of the abusive relationship. All report they received support informally, from female neighbours, friends and even

acquaintances and all but Kate, received more formal support through organized support groups. Michelle mentions her support group as an instrumental influence on her ability to leave her husband.

Diane remembers times after she had left the abusive relationship, when the support of other women was critical:

> It's like when I needed support, they were there. I mean, it's been years. I felt I needed the support, so I came back [to the support group]. And we talked about it and it helped.
>
> You come to group and you are so overwhelmed you can't deal with it [a crisis]. And you start talking and the other women who may not be in crisis at that particular time help you to sort out your feelings. It's really important to connect with these women.

Clandinin and Connelly define the cultivation process as occurring "when someone acts intentionally upon someone else in order to change them, to prepare them for something" (in press). For Diane, Kate, Michelle and Lynn, the support of other women cultivated and nurtured their awakenings.

The three women who attended support groups attest to the value of these gatherings. They identify them as providing them with voice and believe that they were instrumental in developing the ability to remain away from their abusive relationships. They report the groups empowered them, because they provided them with new information, offered from feminist perspectives. They learned a new language, one that moved them away from self-blame and toward self-confidence. All three mentioned the support groups presented them with notions that questioned their basic understanding of themselves and the roles they played within society. They were exposed to new ideas that embodied notions of

patriarchy and power relationships. They learned to call their spouses "abusers." They believe these concepts and their accompanying language helped them to understand the "why" of abuse and the "how" of removing themselves from cruel relationships. These three women experienced "entering a new text from a new critical direction" (Rich, 1979c, p. 35).

As I listened to these testimonials I began to wonder what kind of knowing was represented in these support groups. I did not doubt the women spoke with resonant voices and I knew they were no longer in their abusive relationships. But, I asked myself, were they not acting as received knowers simply receiving different content? Did the leaders of the groups not directly impart information, and did the participants merely receive the knowledge from "the all-knowing external authorities"? (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Was this group process any different from the received knowledge process they experienced in their families and in society at large?

I thought about these questions and wrestled with their implications. It seemed to me that information was transmitted by the "leaders" and that the participants did accept it as received knowers. But the process was more complex. Because the groups embraced feminist ethics, clear attempts were made to keep the power equalized. As Diane said "the groups are run under the notion of equality. We all bring something to the group and we can take away what we like. There is no one answer or no one person with 'the' answer. That is part of our ground rules."

It seems then, that the climate in which knowledge is transmitted and received, influences the process. Perhaps we can think of the procedure as an equation. In the support groups that these women attended, the knowledge was transmitted to someone who didn't know by someone who did know. But the transmittal and reception was completed in an environment concerned with equality and acceptance. This received knowledge, balanced by equality, led to procedural and constructed knowledge. Recall Diane's words, "She wasn't teaching me, we were teaching each other. It was mutual learning."

There is another piece to this awakenings story. On the surface it is a common theme, and I found it difficult to understand how it could be represented in terms of knowledge or learning. I was unsure if it was a theme that lent itself to cultivation, transformation and awakenings. Yet, it was part of all the participants' stories. It is what Kate calls "the financial thing."

Each participant in this study referred to the economic hold that their husband had over her. Diane's husband was so controlling with money that she was not even "given" cash to buy transit tickets. Lynn recalls having to justify buying a donut at the mall. Kate speaks directly about money as power:

> Now a person looking from the outside into the inside . . . into our lives . . . might glimpse, to some degree, at a very pampered woman. But that wasn't my reality. You know, that was my payoff.
>
> He had discouraged . . . no . . . forbidden me to take any kind of job or go to university . . . forbidden me to learn anything that would take me away from the home because it might interfere with his comfort and, of course cost too much money. We talked about when he got his degree, it would be my turn, but that never arose because he always found excuses. He said we didn't have the money for tuition and babysitters. I think the bottom line was that he didn't

> want to lose his power over me. If I became educated, if I got a career or did something where I might be self-sufficient, then he would lose that power.

Money as power is not a novel concept but it is a significant one. The testimonies of the participants in this study suggest that for them, concern for money was a major reason they remained in the relationships for as long as they did. Kate explains how she came to believe that money should not hold her in her relationship.

> Where to find the strength [to leave when you probably face a life that is less economically secure]? Because all of us are afraid of losing something. All of us want security.
>
> It's difficult to leave if you don't see yourself as someone with financial power. As women we need to change how we look at ourselves. It's not just stopping the abuse. You won't stop it if you don't see that you have some power to control your life . . . at a minimum, financial power.
>
> Society needs to reinforce that as women we have earning potential, even if in reality we are for the most part, making less money. I think maybe it is happening, slowly. At least we see some women who are successful and we begin to question the notion that we are all doomed to financial dependence on our mates. We need to teach our young women that they are as responsible for their financial health as for her physical health. It is the "psychological knowledge" that you can and have to do this. We live in a world where making a good apple pie won't ensure your economic security. Just as men can't depend on hunting animals as their economic mainstay, we need to teach our young women to see themselves as able to create financial independence.

In her recent publication, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*, Wolfe (1993) addresses the issue of women and money and speaks to the issues that Kate raises. Wolfe uses a narrative to frame

her thoughts. Listen to the story "the Sheba Principle" which serves as her metaphor for equating money with power:

> A wise and powerful woman makes a brief appearance in the Old Testament. "When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon . . . she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold and precious stones." The king greets her with respect and honour; her wealth gives her the influence to enter his court – he, the son of David – to judge the wisdom of the king, hold the highest male potentate there accountable to her. The 'wealth' is literal, but it is also metaphorical. This is the principle of female material power and politics. (p. 40)

For Wolfe (1993), this narrative illustrates what she sees as a new view of women and money. She believes women "lack a positive emotional vocabulary about money" (p. 40). Recognition of this presents women with new possibilities. Wolfe argues that women's ability to rethink concepts about their capacity to earn decent money cultivates an increase in power. As women begin to move away from the Cinderella notion of men as their economic saviours, and see themselves as capable of creating their own wealth, so do they increase their power. By believing they are capable of earning their own income, women open themselves to strive for economic power and develop "a long dormant part of the female psychology that was eager to rehearse without penalty the unfamiliar experience of channelling ambition, exerting mastery, and generating wealth" (p. 44).

Diane, for example, has developed the belief that she is capable of earning her own income. Although her income dropped after she left her husband, she has recently found a way to supplement her salary. She has used her "expertise" about abuse to supplement her income. She has been hired by the police and various

agencies to provide training in understanding and handling abuse. Diane says that these opportunities not only add to her income but serve "to validate my experience by putting a monetary value on my expertise." She feels that the increase in self-esteem that she gained through the support group and the opportunity to work as a trainer helped her believe she was "capable of providing training for service workers, even though I don't have a master's degree in sociology." This is the same Diane who recalls pinning her financial hopes on "a knight in shining armour." It seems that she "shows how a feminist consciousness is at work "(Wolfe, 1993, p. 44) in our culture and how the cultivation of this consciousness contributed to her awakening to her potential for enabling her own economic survival.

Although a feminist consciousness may be visible in our world, there is evidence that its presence alone does not constitute economic power for women. Research suggests Canadian "women are more likely to be poorer than men" and statistics show that,

> 67% of minimum wage earners are women, and 72% of the part-time labour force where the average hourly wage is less than $7.00 with no benefits, are women. Women with the same education and skills as men performing similar work are paid anywhere from $6000 to $10,000 less per year than men. (Alberta Status of Women Report, 1989, p. 6).

These statistics present the financial reality for a number of women. They imply there is a systemic side to the problem of financial power and it needs systemic remedies.

In this study, Lynn most graphically represents women in poverty. She is on welfare and is attending upgrading so she might find employment. She believes that it takes more than psychological re-programming to facilitate financial power. "So I had these things . . . the welfare system. I mean, if you are a woman working part time through both marriages, like I was, where are you supposed to turn? You just don't have the income coming in and your options are very limited." She attends a program for welfare mothers that works towards skill development and confidence building. Lynn is all too aware of her limited alternatives. She hopes to complete her high school diploma, but realizes the jobs available to her are more likely at the lower end of the wage scale. She is prepared to accept these positions and hopes to save money for further education. For Lynn, financial power involves more than a consciousness that women have the potential to create wealth. She feels another facilitator of the awakened voice is formal education, which is part of her route to economic independence.

Awakenings are part of the connecting story. The co-researchers shared a common awakening process that required cultivation by people, events and collaborative opportunities. The procedure defies connection with a singular developmental theory but rather is linked to a number of concepts.

The Amplified Voice

There is a final chapter to this connecting story. Like the other pieces, it involves voice. This segment of the narrative presents an amplified voice. It is the voice of advocacy.

Advocacy, to paraphrase the Oxford dictionary, is the action of pleading for the cause of another. Chovanec (1993), in her thesis concerning the consciousness raising process of abused women, defines such advocacy as "action taken against the violence in society" (p. 78). Key to this definition are the words "action" and "others."

The participants in this study all demonstrated action to varying degrees, that moved beyond their personal awakenings to attempts to create awakenings within society. The very fact they were all willing to have their stories "published" in this thesis, demonstrates their willingness to advocate for their cause. All report that they speak out about their abuse whenever they are given the opportunity. Lynn's words exemplify this–"so in church now I really have spoken out" [about her abuse and abuse in general]. Michelle, a university student and young mother, wants to take the volunteer training necessary to work with other abused women. At the present, her time is limited but she fulfils an advocacy role by distributing collection tins for a safe house in an Edmonton suburb. Diane, the most experienced advocate of the four, has a long résumé that outlines her advocacy activity. She has co-founded a self-help group for battered women, facilitated support groups, acted as a trainer for the justice department and police departments, presented keynote addresses at conferences, and appeared in a TV news segment dealing with violence against women.

I interpret this advocacy as part of the awakenings that the women experienced. As in my library story, their moves toward social action started as a response to a personal sense of injustice that transformed into an awareness of

the social injustice it represented. The process involves an awakening that includes recognition that "the personal is political." I believe that this process can be equated with consciousness raising as described by the feminist adult educator, Mechtild Hart:

> The full cycle of consciousness raising therefore includes the actual experience of power on the individual level, a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality, and a practical orientation toward emancipatory action. (Hart, 1990a, pp. 70-71)

Advocacy then is a part of the personal/social dialectic. It is the awakening of an amplified voice that expresses the dynamic interplay between the personal and political. Diane provides a picture of this interaction:

> I thought at first that I had caused my abuse . . . that it was just for me. I thought I was alone. But my involvement with the support group helped me. I learned that I had some responsibility for what happened, but I wasn't to blame. I discovered that I wanted to do something that would help other women and so I started the Drop-In centre. Then I started doing more public education, like with the police and stuff. If you don't stand up and spread the word then you can't expect the world to change. We have to get the word out.

So Diane's description of the development of her advocacy is in essence a description of what Hart terms "consciousness raising." By sharing their personal stories, each woman attempted to affect the world around them and through "the re-integration of personal and social lives, new realities were realized" (Chovanec, 1993, p. 79).

The amplified voice is the intensified voice that gets the message out to the world. It is not a whispered or tentative voice, but rather, it is the definitive voice that expresses the personal as political. The amplified voice is a powerful voice that creates a public voice that moves toward action. It is the voice of power.

So I conclude this connecting story on an amplified note. I share the participants' awakened voice. Their stories taught me to see beyond the small, protected world that shaped me, just as their worlds conditioned them. As I described the learning and knowing that creates the awakened and amplified voice, I re-constructed my knowing. The four participants cultivated awakenings in me. I awoke to the powerful nature of their stories and saw how the process of moving from victim to victor is complicated, personal, political and powerful. I recognized the power of our family stories and how they were shaped by society's plot. Most importantly, I learned to hope. The strength and tenacity of these women and their capacity to learn new ways to make meaning of their lives has instilled me with faith that together our voices might just create a cacophony that will help end abuse.

Diane puts it so well in her reponse to my invitation to the participants for feedback on the research process. This is what she wrote:

> After being asked by Kathy, if I wanted to write about how I felt during the research, I agreed. This was one of the most difficult things I have had to do.
>
> This was an exercise in feelings and trust. Since leaving my abusive relationship I have become quite vocal about abuse and the unnecessary and unequal position it places women in. I never believed I would NOT be able to express how I felt, but doing this research reached a new level of trust and peeling away of feelings for me.
>
> The abuse the children and I suffered, seems indelibly etched in my mind, now it would be indelibly etched on parchment. This was a terrifying thought for me for three reasons; (1) would this process allow me to trivialize or rationalize the abuse, because the emotion I felt at the time may not be here, or (2) had the abuse I suffered been so minimal in reality and only horrifying in my own mind, that

I might have been crazy; or (3) had the abuse really been as terrible as I recall. I wasn't sure I wanted to find out which reason was correct.

As Kathy processed my story, bit by bit, I realized that having it in writing was a very freeing experience. Kathy wrote with the emotion that I feared would be absent, and that the abuse was as horrific as I recall, and that I was NOT CRAZY.

Kathy and I talked about how it felt to hear my story with someone else speaking the words. At first it seemed strange, but as I become more comfortable and secure in the knowledge that Kathy was sincerely trying to affect a change in society with her writings and that she not only believed but understood the life story I and other women were telling her, I expressed more openly my hopes and wishes for the generations of women and children of tomorrow.

When the violence stops in our homes, then the children will learn by living that love is not cold and does not hurt, that love is warm and free. Today's children are the adults and parents of tomorrow.

This attitude and idea will also be passed on to their children, because children learn not only what they are formally taught, but also what they see, (interactions between parents); feel, (free to express every thought and idea without fear of reprisal); and hear, (words that are loving, kind, praising as well as disciplining).

Just as I have moved from victim to survivor and now to advocate of women/children, so will my children, and then their children, until the inequality of women is no longer a concern.

Thank you Kathy for offering me this opportunity to broaden my experiences, as scary as it was for me. This process has given me strength and a sense of my own power.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH, ACTION, POWER

The voices in this study have storied the lived experience of four abused women. Their voices moved from silence (victimization) towards voice (power). The women's stories of finding voice inform and create an opportunity for action. The dynamic journey through family and societal stories, to awakenings, creates a sense of power. This power can be directed toward change.

Wolfe (1993) dedicates the final chapter of *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*, to developing action plans that work toward utilizing women's power. "What works best for most women is heavy on results and flexible in its ideology" (p. 18). She identifies "basic power units," such as education, representation, money, health, opportunity, and safety, that are instrumental in facilitating action. Other feminist scholars agree that research should link to action (Golden, 1981; Luke & Gore, 1992; Reinharz, 1992). "The integration of activism and scholarship is essential to the emerging feminist consciousness" (Golden, 1981, p. 1). The co-researchers in this study are similarly concerned. We all asked ourselves what could happen as a result of our work? Following are some of the possibilities that we hoped we could incorporate into our amplified voice.

Publishing the Stories

Four of us are interested in collaboratively publishing our stories. We hope to create an articles(s) that we could submit for magazine publication. As a

"researcher," I would also like to publish the findings in social science journals so that the awakened voice becomes further amplified.

Cross Targeting

Wolfe (1993) suggests that women "cross target" their resources (p. 308). By trading off our areas of expertise, Wolfe proposes that we can create safer climates for advocacy. For example, those who are not physically at risk, can spread the word in hopes of helping those who are hounded by abusive partners or ex-partners. Those women who feel at risk could provide child-care support or, as in the case of the participants in this study, contribute lived experience in confidence and under assumed names. This speaks to issues concerning public education and we all felt that the stories in this study could become part of a series of presentations that two of us felt comfortable in offering to community groups and social agencies.

Political Power

All of us have voting power. We intend to advocate for political candidates who support programs that work toward ending spousal abuse (including programs for welfare mothers and abused women support programs). And we plan to send dollars and women power to aid those candidates with their campaigns.

Consumer Power

According to Wolfe (1993), "advertisers want twenty-five to forty year old women's good opinion more than they do of any other demographic group" (p. 311). Like Wolfe, we believe that women can exercise consumer power. When

we see women portrayed negatively in the media, we plan to send letters of protest to the advertisers stating our refusal to buy their products.

Conclusion

Involvement in this research has allowed me to learn and expand the horizons of my understanding about what it is like to be a woman. By situating my research within our stories I hoped to create a better understanding of the learning that facilitates change. The very real and harmful affects of abuse effect us all. The voices of the women in this study harmonize to develop an awakened and amplified voice that speaks the language of action. I hope that together we can make some small contribution to public understanding of abuse and what it takes to end the violence.

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APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Study Description to Co-researchers (Research Participants)

Hello

I am a master's student in the adult education program at the University of Alberta. For my thesis, I am presenting the story of battered women who decide to leave the battering relationship. I am interested in hearing the lived experiences of women who have been abused by their male partners.

I hope to listen to your story of your battering relationship and your decision to leave so that I might increase my understanding of your experiences. I have recently been involved in a support group for battered women and feel that there is much that your stories can contribute to public education. I believe that there is a need to give voice to your experiences and my experience of hearing your voices.

Participation in the study will involve at least two, possibly three interviews for about two hours each. I will ask you to tell me your story in your own words – about your abuse and the decision to leave. There is no right or wrong way to tell your story, only your way.

The second interview will involve surveying my understanding of your story and verifying it's authenticity. I will share with you my retelling of your story and my interpretation of it. I will share my story of hearing your story.

All identifying information will be kept confidential. I will ask you to chose a name for yourself that I can use in retelling your story. I will be the only person who will know your real name. There is a possibility that I will have someone

transcribe (type from the tapes) your story. If that is necessary that person will assure confidentiality.

Your participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. The university requires consent forms and I would appreciate if you would complete them for me. Even if you sign the consent forms you may opt out at any time. If you decide to withdraw, all information about you will be destroyed. At the end of the project your tapes will be destroyed.

If you have any questions please contact me at 451-9095.

Thanks

Kathy Grieve

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCHER: **K.M. GRIEVE, MASTER'S STUDENT**
DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ADVISOR: **DR. BETH YOUNG, PROFESSOR**
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

I agree to participate in this research project which is intended to present the voices of battered women. The research process involves the documentation of the lived experiences of battered women who decide to leave abusive relationships.

I understand that I am free to ask questions about the research, and expect them to be answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my name will not be disclosed at any time and that the information I provide will be used in such a way as to protect my identity.

I agree that my interviews will be audio recorded and that my words may be reported verbatim.

I understand that I may review and/or retain a copy of each interview tape, if I so chose.

I am aware that Kathy Grieve will retell my story in her words and that she will consult with me from time to time as to the accuracy of her account.

I understand that I am free to refuse to answer specific questions or disclose specific information, and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

_____ _____

(Signature of Participant) (Date)

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(Signature of Researcher)